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Joash.—p. 39.

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BIBLE HISTORY

FOR

THE LEAST AND THE LOWEST.

Vol. IV.

"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." PSALM cxix. 130.

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PREFACE.

THE following pages were not originally intended for Publication. They were written for the instruction of a deaf and dumb child, in whose education it was necessary to employ the simplest form of language; and the object of the writer, therefore, was to convey, in such language, as much scriptural and religious knowledge as the pupil was capable of receiving.

It has been suggested, that, as this little history was found to interest the child for whom it was at first intended, it might possibly be made useful in other cases; either in the

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instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, or among children in general. It is, therefore, now published, in the humble hope, that he, who not unfrequently condescends to employ the weakest instruments, may bless this feeble endeavour to lead the young to the knowledge of his Holy Word.

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BIBLE HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROPHET ELISHA PROTECTED.

THE Prophet Elisha had now, for many years, been a faithful servant of the Lord among the Israelites. Elisha loved the Israelites and wished to do them good, but how did the wicked rulers treat him? They hated him, and many times tried to kill him, but God kept him so that they could not hurt him. And now we are to read a wonderful story, which tells us how God protected the good prophet when the enemies of the Israelites wanted to kill him.

The king of Syria came to fight against Joram, king of Israel. The king of Syria hoped that he might take his enemy by surprise; but Elisha sent many times to Joram,

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and warned him not to go to the place where the Syrian soldiers were; so Joram saved himself from his enemies. The king of Syria called his servants, and said, "Tell me who is it that does this? Who tells the king of Israel where I pitch my camp?" The servants answered, "It is Elisha the prophet. He knows all the secret things thou doest, and tells them to the king of Israel." Then the king of Syria was very angry with Elisha; and he made ready his chariots, and horses, and a great army, and sent them to Dothan, where Elisha was, to take him prisoner. When the soldiers came to Dothan, it was night, and the army surrounded the city, and waited till morning. Elisha's servant rose very early that morning, and went out; and he saw the city surrounded with horses, and chariots, and soldiers, all enemies of the good prophet. The servant was very much frightened; and he cried, and said, "Alas, my master! what shall we do?" Was Elisha frightened? No; he knew that God had more power than all his enemies, and trusted in God to take care of him in this danger; and then he felt safe and happy. And then Elisha said to his servant, "Fear

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not; there are more with us than with our enemies;" for Elisha saw what the servant could not see; a wonderful and beautiful sight which comforted him, and made him feel safe. Then Elisha prayed that the servant might be able to see this wonderful sight too; and God heard Elisha's prayer, and opened the young man's eyes; and then he saw that "The mountain was full of horses, and chariots of fire round about Elisha." These chariots and horses were sent to protect Elisha from his enemies. Who sent them? God himself. His holy angels in heaven are always ready to help and protect his people on earth. Elisha's enemies could not see this heavenly host; but God gave Elisha and his servant power to see them. Elisha had indeed no need to fear; for his wicked enemies could not resist the power of God's messengers.

If *we* are the people of God, he sends his holy angels to protect *us*. "The angels of the Lord encamp around about them that fear him, and deliver them." We cannot see these bright holy angels. They are spirits; they are not made of flesh and blood as we are. But they are always by us. When we are in dan-

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ger, they are near to protect us. When we are asleep in the dark night, they watch around our beds; and when we die, they will be near us, and carry our happy souls to heaven to be with God forever. The holy angels love to be sent to God's people, to help and comfort them; and they are never tired of obeying God, and doing his work. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of Salvation?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMINE IN SAMARIA.

Some time after, king Ben-hadad came to Samaria, and besieged it. A siege is a very dreadful thing. The poor people in a besieged city cannot come out to get food; and their enemies will not let any be carried in; so the food in the city is very soon gone, and then if the siege continues a long time the famine begins. The famine in Samaria now was very dreadful. The people gave much money for very little food, and bad food too. They gave eighty pieces of silver for an ass's head; and were glad to eat

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this because they were so very hungry. Some of them even killed and eat their own little children! One day the king of Israel was passing by the wall, and he heard a woman crying, "Help, my lord O king!" But the king answered, "If the Lord do not help thee, how can I help thee? Have I food to give thee?" Then he turned to the woman, and asked why she cried. The poor woman pointed to another near her, and said, "That woman asked me to give my child yesterday, for food for her and me; so I took my little son, and we boiled him, and eat him; and she promised to give her own son for us to eat to day; but when I asked for him, she would not let him be killed. She has hid her child and now we have no food." The king rent his clothes when he heard this sad story, and turned away from the woman; for he could not bear to hear more.

The king was very unhappy, but he was not humbled in all his trouble. He did not repent of his own sins, and of his people's sins; and he did not ask help from God. No, the king was angry with Elisha, who, he thought, had brought this trouble upon them all; and he said, "Elisha shall be put to death; he shall

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not live another day." Elisha was sitting quietly in his house with his friends. They were all peaceful and happy, because their trust was in God, and they knew he would take care of them. And so he did; for before Joram sent to take Elisha, to put him to death, God told the prophet of his danger, and helped him to prepare for it. Then Elisha said to his friends, "A messenger is coming from the king, to cut off my head. When you hear him, shut the door, and hold him there; for the king his master will soon follow him." So the door was locked; and the prophet was preserved in safety. God had preserved Elisha many times, and he did not forsake him now. How happy those people are whom the Lord protects! They need never fear if he is with them.

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CHAPTER III.

PLENTY IN SAMARIA.

THE king of Israel soon followed the messenger to Elisha's house; but he did not come now to hurt the prophet. Joram was in despair, for he thought that he and his people must soon all perish with hunger. But God can send help in the greatest troubles, and he was now going to send help to Israel. So Elisha, at God's command, said to the king, "Hear what God says; to-morrow, flour, and barley shall be sold in plenty in Samaria." This was good news for Joram and his people, but they did not all believe what Elisha said. There was with the king, a nobleman of Israel, and the king leaned upon his arm as he stood by Elisha. This lord did not believe that there should be plenty of food in Samaria next day. He thought such a thing was too wonderful even for God to do; and he answered Elisha very disrespectfully, and said, "No, this cannot be; I will not believe it:" he forgot that every thing is possible with God. Then Elisha turned to the unbelieving noble-

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man, and said, "Thou shalt see the food to-morrow with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat of it." The nobleman did not care for what Elisha said; but God remembered his sin, and soon punished him for it. And God remembered also his promise to give plenty of food next day to the poor hungry people in Samaria. That night he put fear into the hearts of the Syrians, so that they thought they heard a noise of horses, and chariots, and a great army. There was nothing to make them afraid; all was still; but God could fill them with fear, when no earthly enemy was near to hurt them. So they said one to another, "The king of Israel is coming against us, and all his soldiers, and the king of Egypt is coming too, and many more kings, and very great armies with them; what shall we do?" Then they all arose, and left their tents, and their horses, and gold, and silver, and garments, and food; and escaped for their lives. The Israelites knew nothing of this: they were all in the city, sad, and full of trouble; not thinking how wonderfully God was going to deliver them.

By the gate of the city, sat four poor lepers. They were not allowed to be with other men;

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they were obliged to keep by themselves, without friends or neighbours to comfort them. These poor lepers were very hungry; they had had no food for a long time; and now, they felt so weak and ill, that they thought they must soon die. But God had food to give these poor men, when all their hope was gone. They said to one another, "Why do we stay here? We must soon die. If we stay here, we must die; and if we go into the city, we must die. Let us go to the Syrians' camp; perhaps they may save us; or if they kill us, we need not care; for it is better to die by the sword, than to perish with hunger; let us go." So they arose, and went to the Syrians' camp. It was God that made them wish to go. Why? Because he had provided food for them there. When the lepers came to the camp, they saw no man; they went into a tent, but no soldiers were in it. Food was there in plenty; and the poor hungry lepers eat and drank, and then they looked round, and saw gold, and silver, and garments in the tent, as the Syrians left them. The men took all these things, and hid them; and then they went to another tent, and found more; and they eat

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and drank there too, and took the gold and silver, and hid them. Then the lepers said to one another, "We must not be selfish, and keep all to ourselves, while the poor people in the city are starving. Let us go and tell the good news to the king's servants." So they went to the man who kept the gates of the city, and told him what they had seen; and the man told the king's servants, and the servants, told the king. It was still night; but the king arose directly he heard the news, and called his servants, and commanded them to go with horses and seek the Syrians. He thought, perhaps, they might be secretly hidden somewhere; but no; the servants went as far as Jordan, and could not find them. The Syrians had escaped to their own country; and the road was covered with vessels and garments which they had thrown away in their haste. Then the servants returned, and told the king that the Syrians were really gone. So the poor people of Samaria went without fear to the Syrians' tents, and took away all that was in them; and food was sold in plenty in Samaria that day, as Elisha had foretold.

But where was the unbelieving lord? The

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king commanded him to stand at the gate, and keep it. Multitudes of people passed by, carrying food in plenty; and this lord saw that God had power to do what he promised, and that Elisha had spoken truth. But the great plenty in Samaria did no good to that unbelieving nobleman. He did not live to enjoy it. The crowds of people pressed upon him, and threw him down; and he fell, and was trodden under foot, and died, as Elisha had said. What a sad thing unbelief is! How angry it makes God! Though people may not believe God, nor care for what he says now, they will be obliged to believe and care in another world. They will know then that all God says is truth. All his promises to the righteous will come true, and all his threatenings to the wicked too.

We must not forget the good Shunammite who was so kind to Elisha. The prophet told her of the famine which was to take place, and told her to remove to a neighbouring country where there was food. She did so, and after seven years the famine was over, and God brought her to her own happy home again.

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CHAPTER IV.

BEN-HADAD'S DEATH.

ELISHA was now in Damascus, where Ben-hadad king of Syria lived. Ben-hadad was very ill; and when he heard that Elisha was come, he wished to send to the prophet, and ask, if he should recover. So Ben-hadad called one of the great men of Syria, named Hazael, and told him to take a present, and go to Elisha.

Hazael came to Elisha, and stood before him, and said, "Ben-hadad has sent me to thee saying, shall I recover from this disease?" Elisha answered, "Go, and say to Ben-hadad, Thou mayest indeed recover; but the Lord has showed me that he will surely die." Hazael wondered at this message; and he looked at Elisha and saw that the prophet was weeping. Then Hazael wondered still more, and asked, "Why weepeth my lord?" Elisha answered, "Because I know what evil thou wilt do to my people Israel; thou wilt destroy their houses, and kill them with the sword." Hazael looked very much astonished, and said, "What, can I do this

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great thing?" Then Elisha answered, "The Lord has told me that thou shalt be king of Syria." So Hazael went home to Damascus, but he did not forget what Elisha had said. Hazael was a very ambitious man. He wanted to be king, though he had no right to the kingdom; and God, who knew Hazael's heart, knew that very soon he would make himself king. Hazael, perhaps had thought of this a long while; and now the time was coming when he could do it. He went home, and found Ben-hadad still very ill. The king called Hazael, and asked him, "What did Elisha say? Then Hazael deceitfully answered, "He told me that thou shalt surely recover." Ben-hadad was pleased to hear this. He began to think, perhaps of all the things he would do when he was well again; he did not care now to prepare to die. He did not know how very near death was; for Hazael did not tell him all that Elisha had said. Hazael told Ben-hadad only half Elisha's message and kept the rest to himself. All that day, dreadful thoughts were in Hazael's heart. What were those thoughts? He was thinking how he could kill his master, and make himself king of Syria. When Hazael began to wish for th

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kingdom, he did not think of doing what was so very wicked. But Hazael did not try to conquer his sinful ambition, and it grew stronger and stronger, and, at last, he was tempted to murder. The next day, Hazael took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and laid it upon Ben-hadad's face; and the king was suffocated. Hazael had his wish now; he was made king of Syria. But could he be happy? No; he could not have God's blessing, and without that none can be happy. Riches, and possessions, and honors, cannot give happiness.

This is a sad story. Hazael was a very wicked man; but remember, that our hearts are all like Hazael's, before they are made new by God's Holy Spirit. We are all, by nature, proud and ambitious, and covetous; and if God's grace prevent not, Satan may tempt us to do things as wicked as Hazael did. Hazael did not at first think of murdering his master. He began by being only ambitious and covetous. Sins will grow greater and greater, if we do not pray to God to subdue them. Satan will tempt us more and more, if we do not fight against him in God's strength. But if we do pray for help, God promises to give it. He says, he

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will "subdue our iniquities," and give us the victory over sin and Satan.

CHAPTER V.

JEHORAM AND AHAZIAH, KINGS OF JUDAH.

JEHOSHAPHAT, the good king of Judah, was now dead, and his son Jehoram reigned after him. There were two kings named Jehoram or Joram; one, king of Israel, and the other, king of Judah. They were both wicked. Jehoram, king of Judah, was not like his good father; he was more like the wicked kings of Israel. As soon as he was made king, he put all his seven brothers to death, and took their riches for himself; and then he thought he might feel safe and strong; but his happiness did not last long. His subjects rebelled against him, and he was not able to subdue them. Why was this trouble sent to Jehoram? The Bible tells us,—"Because he has forsaken the Lord God." When people forsake God, trouble must come upon them; God will not bless those who forget him.

One day a letter was brought to king Jeho-

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ram. It was a very old letter. It had been written many years before by the good prophet Elijah. God had told Elijah about this wicked king Jehoram, and all that he would do, and Elijah wrote the letter by God's command. And what was in the letter? A very fearful message from God to wicked king Jehoram, "Thus saith the Lord; because thou hast forsaken me, and worshipped idols, and not served me as thy fathers, Asa and Jehoshaphat did, I will send a plague upon thee, and upon thy family, and upon thy people, and upon all that thou hast; and I will smite thee with a dreadful sickness, and thou shalt die." This was sad news for Jehoram. It all came to pass very soon. God sent enemies to fight against him; and they took away his money, and his children, and carried them into other countries. But still Jehoram did not repent; and therefore, God punished him again with the dreadful illness he had threatened. Jehoram suffered very much for a long time, and none could cure him. His physicians could not do him any good; medicines could not take away his pain; he had no wife, no children to comfort him; all were gone; and his people did not love him,

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nor care about him. At last, Jehoram died, and was buried in Jerusalem. But the people did not mourn for him; and they did not honour him at his burial.

After Jehoram's death the people made his son, Ahaziah, king. He was like his father very wicked. Ahaziah had been brought up wickedly. His parents taught him what was wrong; "His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly."

Ahaziah's wicked mother was named Athaliah. She taught her son what was wrong, and Ahaziah was always ready to do like her. He loved wickedness, and the friends he choose were wicked like himself. He went with Joram, the wicked king of Israel, to fight against Hazael king of Syria. Joram was wounded and returned to Jezreel to be cured of his wounds; and while he was laying there sick Ahaziah went to see him.

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CHAPTER VI.

JEHU MADE KING.

WHILE Joram was still at Jezreel, Elisha called one of the sons of the prophets, and gave him a message from God. Elisha said to the young man, "Go now quickly to Ramoth-Gilead. Take a box of oil in thine hand; and when thou comest to Ramoth-Gilead, seek there for a man named Jehu, and call him to thee, and take him into a room alone, and pour the oil upon his head, and make him king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee." The young prophet obeyed Elisha directly. He did not wait to ask why, nor murmur at the command. The sons of the prophets were taught obedience; obedience to God, and obedience to their master Elisha. Young people should always obey those who are over them, without lingering, and without unwillingness. This is Christ's command, "Obey them that have the rule over you."

The young prophet went to Ramoth-Gilead, and soon found Jehu. Jehu was a captain of

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the army, and he was sitting with the other captains when the prophet came to him. Jehu was not thinking about being king; he did not know how God was now going to honour him; But the prophet called to Jehu, and said, "I have a message for thee, O captain." So Jehu arose and went into another room with the prophet alone. Then the young man took out the box of oil, and poured it upon Jehu's head, and said, "Thus saith the Lord, I anoint thee king of Israel. Thou shalt smite all the family of Ahab, and punish them for Jezebel's cruelty to my holy prophets. All the family of Ahab shall perish, and the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel in Jezreel." Then the prophet opened the door, and fled. Jehu wondered very much, perhaps, to hear all this; but he went quietly back again to his friends, and sat down. They all wanted to know who the young man was who had called Jehu; and one asked, "Why did that mad fellow come to thee?" Jehu answered, "Do not you know?" They said, "No, we know nothing; tell us why he came." Then Jehu said, "He anointed me king over Israel in God's name." Did the captains wonder very much? Yes; but they were all

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willing to have Jehu for their king; for God made them willing. They all arose, and took their garments, and put them under Jehu, upon the top of the stairs; and they blew the trumpets, and shouted, "Jehu is king." Jehu told the captains to keep the secret from the people in Jezreel; and then he rode in his chariot, and went to Jezreel, where Joram and Ahaziah were still staying.

When Joram heard this, he commanded his servants to make his chariots ready, and he and Ahaziah rode to meet Jehu. When they came near, Joram cried, "Is it peace, Jehu?" But Jehu answered, "No; there can be no peace while thy wicked mother Jezebel is living." Joram began to be frightened. and cried out to his friend Ahaziah. But Ahaziah could not help Joram now. The time was come when both these wicked kings must be punished for their sins, and none could save them. Jehu drew his bow with all his strength, and shot an arrow into Joram's heart; and the king fell down dead in his chariot. This happened near the place where Naboth's vineyard was, and where Naboth had been so cruelly stoned. Then Jehu said, "Take Joram's dead body,

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and throw it into the field of Naboth; for I remember that God said to Ahab, when Naboth was killed. Here will I punish Ahab for shedding Naboth's blood." So they cast Joram's dead body into the field, as Jehu commanded.

Where was Ahaziah? He did not live long after his wicked friend's death. Jehu smote him in his chariot; and the wounded king fled to Megiddo, and died there. This was the sad end of these two wicked kings. And why did they die in this dreadful way? Because they had sinned against God, and served idols, and rebelled against his holy laws. God had not forgotten Ahab's sins. He had not forgotten the murder of Naboth. God cannot forget sin which is unrepented of. Ahab had not repented; Joram had not repented; Jezebel had not repented; and, therefore, punishment came upon them all. What a dreadful thing sin is! And does not God punish sin now? Yes; not, perhaps, as he punished Ahab's sins. People may live many years in wickedness, and die at last quietly in their beds;—not as Joram and Ahaziah did. But has God forgotten their sin? No; he has written all in his book of remembrance; and, if not before, these wicked people must be pun-

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ished for their sins when they die, and be cast away from God for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

AHAB'S FAMILY DESTROYED.

THE wicked queen, Jezebel, was in Jezreel; and when she heard that Jehu was come, she made herself ready to see him. Jezebel was very bold, and hardened in her sins. She had no fear of God; she cared for nothing but her own pleasures, and vanities, and sins. And now Jezebel dressed herself very finely, and painted her face, and looked out of the window of her house to see Jehu. Jehu looked up to the window; and when he saw Jezebel, he cried to the people who were in the room with her, "Who will help me?" Two or three servants looked out of the window directly, and Jehu said to them, "Throw Jezebel down." The servants were willing to obey Jehu, for they did not love their cruel wicked mistress; so they took her up, and threw her out of the window; and her blood was sprinkled upon the walls, and upon the horses; and Jehu trod her

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under foot, and she died. Jehu now went into the house, and eat, and drank, and rested himself. But when he had finished, he said, "Go now, and see this cursed woman, and bury her; for she is a king's daughter." So some of the people went to the place where Jezebel fell, to take up the body. But what did they find? Only her head, and her feet, and part of her hands. All the rest of the body was gone. Where was it gone? The dogs had eaten it. They had torn it to pieces, and devoured the flesh, and broken the bones; and none could know the dead body now, nor say, "This is Jezebel." The people, who looked at the dreadful sight, went to Jehu again, and told him what they had seen. Then Jehu remembered what God had said, so many years before, by Elijah the prophet, "The dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel in Jezreel, where Naboth died."

Wicked Ahab, and Jezebel, and Joram were now punished for their sins, as God had said; but many of Ahab's children still lived; and God had said that all that wicked family must be destroyed; none must be spared. Jehu knew this. God had commanded him to punish

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Ahab's family, and Jehu obeyed the command. Ahab's sons were all at Samaria, with the great men of the city, who brought them up. These great men were afraid of Jehu, and at his command put all Ahab's children to death. God's word is truth."

Then Jehu went to Samaria, and there he met the brothers of Ahaziah. Jehu destroyed these wicked men too; and then all Ahab's family were dead, and all Ahaziah's.

Destruction is the punishment of sin. It is sad to think of these poor men perishing by the sword; but it is still more sad to think of their souls perishing forever. How dreadful must be the punishment of sin in the next world! But God does not wish sinners to perish. He wishes them all to repent, and come to Jesus Christ, and be saved. Jesus is ready and willing to save all who believe in him; and the Holy Spirit is ready and willing too, to cleanse the hearts of all who will pray as David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE KING SAVED.

Who was king of Judah after Ahaziah's death? When Athaliah, the wicked mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she destroyed all the king's sons, excepting one, and made herself queen. Ahaziah's youngest son was then a baby; he could not take care of himself, but God took care of him; and this little child was saved when all his brothers were killed. His aunt, Jehoshabeath, hid him and his nurse from wicked Athaliah, and brought him home, and kept him in safety in God's house six years. The husband of this good aunt was named Jehoiada; he was a priest of the Lord. Jehoiada lived in the temple, and little Joash and Jehoshabeath lived there too. Joash was better taught here than if he had been brought up in the palace. Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath loved God, and they tried to make the little boy love him. They taught him to read God's word and to sing God's praises. Children are never too young to begin to love God. Jesus wishes them to come to him, and is

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always willing to receive and bless them. He says now, as he said when he was upon earth, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Those are happy children who have kind friends to bring them up in the fear of God. It is better to have good friends who love God, than rich friends who love the world. Little Joash was happier in God's holy temple, than he could have been in Athaliah's fine palace.

When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada thought the right time was come to make him king. So he called the captains, and Levites, and many of the people of Judah, and asked them to help him. And he assembled all the people in the temple, and there they made a covenant together. The good priest spoke to them, and said, "Joash the king's son, shall reign. God has promised that David's sons shall sit upon the throne of Judah. So Jehoiada armed the captains and the people, and placed them all round the temple, to guard the young king. Then they brought little Joash into the house of the Lord, and put the crown upon his head; and Jehoiada anointed him, and said, "God save the king;" and all the people shouted for joy and cried again, "Joash is king." Athaliah

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heard the noise of the people running and shouting, and rejoicing, and wondered why it was —she knew nothing about little Joash; she thought he had perished with his brothers, many years before. So Athaliah ran in haste to the house of God; and there she saw Joash standing, as king, by a pillar, and the princes and people blowing the trumpets, and shouting, and rejoicing, and singing praises. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, "Treason, Treason!" But Athaliah had no friends to help her now. Jehoiada called the captains; and they ran to Athaliah and took her out of the house of God, and put her to death. She deserved to die, for she had murdered many of her son's family, to make herself queen; and she was justly punished for her wickedness, and put to death herself. Punishment will always come upon murderers at last.

Joash was now king, and could reign in peace. What care God had taken of this little child, all the six years he had been hidden from his cruel grandmother! Why did God care so much for Joash? Because God remembered his promise to David. God loved David, and he loved David's children after him, and pro-

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mised to give them the kingdom of Judah. And God loved Judah, and when the right time came, he gave wisdom, and strength and courage, to Jehoiada, that he might make Joash king, and slay wicked Athaliah. How wise and good God is! we may trust all to him. Ourselves, and our friends, and our country, —all are in his keeping; and if we love him, and trust in him as Jehoiada did, we may know that all will be well, and not fear any dangers, nor difficulties, nor troubles.

Joash was a very little boy when he began to reign; only seven years old. Kings have many duties to perform which are very difficult, and very troublesome; and they need great wisdom to perform these duties rightly. Children seldom have so much wisdom as older people; and if they trust to their own knowledge they always do what is foolish, and ignorant, and even wicked. But God will give holy wisdom to every child who asks him for it. It was a happy thing for little Joash that he had his good uncle to teach him and advise him. Young people always need advice, and they ought to be very thankful and very attentive to the kind and good friends who give it them. Joash

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did right all the time Jehoiada lived, because he attended to what that good priest told him.

The house of God had been sadly broken up by the wicked queen Athaliah; and now Joash wished very much to repair it. But Joash knew this would cost much money, more than he could give; so he told the Levites, to go all through the country, and ask the people to give money to build up God's house. But the Levites were very slow and took a long time to collect the money.

Joash was displeased to see his people so slow. He called Jehoiada, and said, "Why are the Levites so long in collecting money for God's house? Tell the people to bring their money to the temple; and we will put a box by the door of the temple, and the money shall be thrown in there." So Jehoiada took a box, and made a hole in the top of it, and put it by the door of the house of the Lord; and all the people were told to bring their money, and to cast it into this box. The people were very glad to do this; they did not want to keep their riches for themselves, but were willing and joyful to give much of it to God. The box was soon full; and the Levites opened it, and

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counted the money, and emptied the box, and put it in its place again. The money was given to the carpenters, and masons, and workmen, who repaired the house of God, to pay them for their work.

Let us learn to be as generous, in giving our money in God's service, as the good people of Judah were. If we love God, we shall be as glad to contribute, as the people of Judah were. Rich people would throw in a great deal, if they truly loved God; and poor people would try to throw in a little. All would give something: and they would give it joyfully; for God does not like unwilling offerings. "God loveth a cheerful giver."

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CHAPTER IX.

JEHU'S REIGN.

JEHU was still reigning in Samaria. When he came there, he slew all who were left of Ahab's family. God's word by Elijah was now fulfilled.

Jehu called all the people together, and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little, but I will serve him much. Call all the prophets and servants of Baal to me. I am going to make a great feast and sacrifice to Baal, and I shall put to death all who do not come." Then all the people who worshipped Baal, in the land of Israel, made themselves ready, and came to the sacrifice in the house of Baal. The house was full, from one end to the other, with these wicked idolaters. Then Jehu told his servants to bring robes for all the worshippers of Baal, and the servants obeyed. Jehu did all this deceitfully; he did not really worship Baal; he only pretended that he served him. Why? Because he wished to deceive the idolaters, and to bring them together, that he might slay them. Was all this right? It was right to destroy

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Baal, but very wrong to do it so deceitfully. Deceit can never be right in any thing. All we do ought to be done in truth and sincerity.

When the worshippers of Baal were gathered together, Jehu sent to see that none of the Lord's servants were among them; for only Baal's people were to be there. Then Jehu called a great many men, and told them to stand outside the house. The people within were offering their sacrifices, little thinking of the danger that was so near to them. Then Jehu commanded the men to rush in, and slay all the worshippers of Baal, and not let one escape. It was a dreadful sight. The soldiers ran into the house of Baal, with their swords in their hands, and smote every one there; men, and women, and children; all perished in their sin! Then the men broke down Baal's house, and destroyed the images, and burnt them; so there were no worshippers of Baal left in Israel. This was well; but the people had idols still. They worshipped the golden calves that Jeroboam had put in Bethel and in Dan. And Jehu had his idols too. He had done many things that were right. He had obeyed God's command about Ahab's family, and he had destroy-

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ed the worship of Baal; and Jehu was very proud of the good things he had done, and boasted about his zeal for the Lord. But Jehu was not a true servant of God. He was an able man; but he had no love of holiness. He had never repented of his sins, nor served God with all his strength. He served the world, and his own pleasures, and his sins, much more. Could God love and bless Jehu? No; for he wants all the heart, and love, and service of people; not only a part of them, but all. Those cannot be the children of God who pretend to honour him, but do not really love him.

Many people now are like Jehu. They talk about God, and say they are his servants, and pretend to be very anxious for his honour, and, perhaps, boast of the good things they do. But all the time these people's hearts are not right. God looks there. Their neighbours can see only what they do, and hear what they say; God knows what they feel, and what they think. If they, in heart, love the world more than they love God, they are not really his people; and they cannot deceive him. How sad it is to know and do what is right in the sight of men, while the heart is not right in the sight of God!

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We ought to pray as David did, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF JOASH.

When Jehu died, his son Jehoahaz reigned over Israel. Jehu loved the world; and God gave him, and his sons after him, worldly honours, and worldly possessions. But Jehu and his children did not care for heavenly things; and, therefore, they had no possessions in that world which will last forever. How sad it is to have our good things here, and none in Heaven! Worldly things must soon pass away; but heavenly riches will never, never perish.

Joash was still king of Judah; but his kind friend, the good priest Jehoiada, was dead. He lived to be a very old man, 130 years old. He had served God many years, and done much good in Israel, and all the people loved and honored him. His death was a happy thing for him, but it was a sad thing for Joash and

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his people. They grew tired of serving God, and went to their foolish idols again, and worshipped them. Did Joash let his people do these wicked things? Yes; Joash encouraged them in their sin; for he also had forgotten God, and all his early wishes to love and serve Him. When Jehoiada died, all the goodness of Joash died too.

Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, was still living, and he was very much grieved to see the king and his people doing so wickedly; and God was angry, and he sent holy prophets to tell them so; but the people would not attend. At last Zechariah himself went to speak to the king and the people. He was a good man; God's Spirit was upon him, and he felt that he ought to be bold, and to speak the truth to his king. Zechariah loved Joash. He had known him many years; perhaps they had lived together, when children, in the temple; and learnt together the holy things which good Jehoiada taught them, and prayed and sung God's praises together in his house. Joash was happy then; but now all his peace was gone, because he had lost the blessing of God, and was making Him angry every day, and going far away from

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holiness and Heaven. So Zechariah went to Joash, and spoke very solemnly to him and to the people. Zechariah said, "Why do you disobey God's holy commands? You cannot prosper now. When you were obedient to God, you had his blessing; but now you have forsaken Him and he has forsaken you." But Joash had become hardened in sin; He no longer cared for God, nor for Jehoiada, nor for Zechariah. He was angry with that bold and faithful man, and encouraged the people to conspire against him; and the good priest was slain in the temple of the Lord.

Zechariah did not try to defend himself, when he saw his murderers coming to kill him. He submitted quietly to the cruel command of Joash; but as he lay wounded and dying, he said, "God sees, and he will punish;" and then he closed his eyes, and died. And God did see this wicked, and ungrateful act; and he did punish Joash for it. The Syrians came, and destroyed many of the princes of Judah, and took away their riches. God first sent the Syrians to punish Joash; and then he smote him with dreadful diseases. Joash had enemies without; and, in himself, he was sick, and in

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pain, and in trouble. He had no friends. God, was not his friend; for Joash had forsaken God, and, therefore, God forsook him. His servants and his people were not his friends; they could not love him, because he was so cruel, and so ungrateful. The priests and prophets were not his friends; for he had driven them all away, and they could not come to see him now. When he thought of his sins,—his ingratitude, his cruelty, his forgetfulness of God, he must have felt miserable indeed. Once he had been happy; he had friends to love him, and God to bless him, and all was well then. But now, he had lost all. Why? Because he had forsaken God. And then came the end of Joash. A very dreadful end it was. His own servants conspired against him, and killed him in his bed! God had seen Zechariah's death, and now he was avenging it. Joash was justly punished for his murder; though his servants were very wicked to kill their king.

We may learn something from this sad story. There are many people now, we may fear, very much like Joash. Children are often brought up, as he was, in the fear and love of God. Kind parents and friends teach them

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what is right, as Jehoiada taught Joash; and, perhaps, the children attend, and are pleased with what is taught them; and their teachers hope that they are really beginning to love and serve the Lord. But, after a time, these kind friends die, perhaps, or are taken away. The young people are very sorry to lose them, as sorry as Joash was when old Jehoiada died; and they think, "We will never, never forget what our kind friends taught us, but always remember them, and love them." And, perhaps, they do remember them for a little time; but soon they begin to trust in their own power and goodness, forgetting how weak and sinful they are; they neglect to pray to God, and to ask him for help and strength; Satan tempts them to be careless about holy things, and they do not resist him. They love the world more and more, and God less and less, every day. And, at last, they forget all their kind friends taught them; they do not like to remember it, and they are angry with those who kindly warn them, as Zechariah warned Joash. What must be the end of these young people? If God in mercy does not make them repent and turn to him, their end must be as sad as the end of

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Joash. They may not be killed in their beds, as he was; but they will die, as he died without comfort, without hope. Pray to God to keep you; because you cannot keep yourself. Say to him, "My father, thou art the guide of my youth." Then he will keep you all your life long, and bring you at last to his eternal home in Heaven.

CHAPTER XI.

AMAZIAH.

AMAZIAH, the son of Joash, reigned now in Judah. The first thing he did was to kill the servants who had killed his father. And this was right, for they were wicked murderers, and the Bible tells us, that murderers must be put to death. Then Amaziah gathered together a large army from Judah, and hired some men of Israel to help him to fight against his enemies. But a prophet came to Amaziah, and said, "Let not the army of Israel go with thee; for God is not among them; and, if they go, he will make thee fall; for he has power to help, and to cast down." Then Amaziah

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said, "I have hired the men of Israel, and paid them; what shall I do for the money?" Amaziah loved money too much. Money can do us no good without God's blessing, and if we have God's blessing, we need not care for money. The prophet told Amaziah this. He said, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than that money." So the king obeyed, and sent away the army of Israel. The Israelites were very angry; but God's blessing was upon Judah, and therefore they had no need to fear Israel's anger.

Amaziah smote the Edomites, and took away their idols, and brought them to Jerusalem; but there he bowed down to these new gods and worshipped them. This was a sad end of his victory. God had given him power to conquer his enemies; yet he showed no gratitude no love to God, for all his mercies. The prophet came to Amaziah to warn him about his sins. He said, "Why hast thou sought these new gods? Can they deliver thee? Can they save thee?" But Amaziah had grown so wicked, that he did not like to be reproved; and he was angry with the prophet who spoke to him. When the prophet saw that Amaziah did not

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like reproof, he said no more; but one thing he told him, as he was going away, and a very fearful thing it was. He said "I know that God will destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and not hearkened to my reproof." How foolish and wicked it is, not to receive reproof! If Amaziah had attended humbly to the prophet, he might have been saved; but now, it was too late. Solomon says, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Learn to attend to the reproof of wise and kind friends, and to be thankful for it.' "He that heareth reproof getteth understanding."

Soon after this, Amaziah sent to the king of Israel, and told him he wished to fight with him. Jehoash was now king of Israel; he was the son of Jehoahaz, and grandson of Jehu. Israel's army was stronger than Judah's. Jehoash knew this, and advised Amaziah not to come to a battle. He said, "Abide quietly at home; why wilt thou come and fall in the battle; thou and Judah with thee?" This was wise advice; but Amaziah was so obstinate and self-willed, that he attended no more to the advice of Jehoash, then he had to the

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reproof of the prophet. God had left Amaziah to himself; for this foolish king had forsaken God; he would have his own way, and now, it was bringing him to destruction. Jehoash soon conquered Amaziah; and then went to Jerusalem, and broke down the walls, and took away the gold and silver from the temple, and from the king's house, and carried all to Samaria. Thus Amaziah suffered for his self-will; but all his sorrows and sufferings did not make him repent; he still lived in forgetfulness of God, attending to his own pleasures and will, and not doing the will of God. At last, his people made a conspiracy against him, and Amaziah was slain. This was the sad end of that foolish and wicked king. See how dangerous it is to forsake God, and to choose our own ways, and not his ways! Pride and self-will brought destruction upon Amaziah. Learn then, from him, to be humble, and willing to attend to advice and reproof. Our own way must end in destruction. It may please us for a little time, but it will never take us to Heaven. "There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

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CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH OF ELISHA.

Was Elisha still alive? Yes; but he was now an old man, and very near death; and King Jehoash went to see him when he was ill. Jehoash was not a good man; but he loved and honoured Elisha, and this was right. The king knew how useful Elisha had been to his country; and he was very sorry to lose him, and wept over him, and cried, "O my father, my father." Israel had suffered much from the Syrians; and Jehoash feared, that now he should have no kind friend to help and comfort him. But Elisha wished to teach the king, that God could still protect Israel. The prophet taught Jehoash this by signs. He gave the king a bow and arrows, and put his hands upon the king's hands, and told Jehoash to open the window eastward. Jehoash opened it, and the prophet said, "Shoot." Jehoash shot the arrow out of the window, as Elisha told him; and then the prophet explained to Jehoash what the sign meant. He said, "This is the arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria.

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Thus shalt thou smite the Syrians, and destroy them." Then Elisha told the king to take the arrows again, and smite upon the ground. Jehoash did so; but he smote only three times upon the ground, and then stayed without waiting for Elisha's command. This made the prophet angry. He saw that Jehoash had no faith in God, no trust in him, no care to obey his commands; and he said to the king, "Thou oughtest to have smitten many times; then Syria should have been quite destroyed; but now thou shalt smite Syria only three times."

The Syrians had long troubled Israel. Hazael was king of Syria, and he was cruel to the Israelites, as Elisha had prophesied that he would be. But after Hazael was dead, Jehoash conquered the Syrians three times, and got possession again of the cities they had taken. Yet Jehoash smote the Syrians only three times. Why? Because he was so impatient, and had so little faith, when Elisha at God's command, told him to smite upon the ground. It is wrong to grow tired of obeying the commands of God. We must persevere in what we have to do. Like Jehoash, we have enemies to fight; and strong-

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er enemies than the Syrians. Who are these enemies? Satan and worldliness and our own wicked hearts, and sinful passions and tempers. These are very strong enemies indeed. How can we conquer them? Not by our own power. Not with bows and arrows, and swords and spears. We must ask God to fight for us. We must look in faith to Jesus Christ, and ask him to give us the victory. But we must not be like Jehoash, soon tired of praying and fighting against these enemies. We must not resist them two or three times only, and then leave off. If we do this, our enemies will soon conquer us. No we must fight and pray every day we live; because every day Satan and our own sinful hearts try to overcome us. And if we persevere, we shall conquer at last; for God promises the victory to all those who fight trusting in his strength, and not in their own. "We are more than conquerers through him that loved us."

Good old Elisha died, and was buried. All his troubles and sorrows were ended, and his happy soul went to join Elijah in Heaven. Soon after Elisha's death, the Moabites came to invade the land. One day, as some Israelites

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were burying a dead man, they looked up, and saw the Moabites coming. The friends of the dead man took up the body in haste, and threw it into Elisha's tomb, for they were so much afraid, that they could not stay to bury it. But a wonderful thing happened when the dead man was put down into the tomb. As soon as the body touched the bones of Elisha, it revived; and the man lived again, and stood upon his feet. There was no power in Elisha's bones to revive the man. It was God who did the miracle; and he showed the people by it, how much he loved his faithful servant, and honoured him after his death.

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CHAPTER XIII.

JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE.

AFTER the death of Jehoash, his son Jeroboam reigned over Israel. He was a very wicked man, as wicked as the other kings of Israel who had reigned before him.

A prophet was living in Israel at this time, named Jonah; and God commanded him to go with a message to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was a very large and rich city in Assyria, and a great many people lived in it; but, unhappily, Nineveh was a very wicked city. The king and the people worshipped idols, and not God. They were proud of their greatness and of their riches; but they thought nothing about him who gave them all they possessed. We may fear, that there are many great cities now, very much like Nineveh; cities full of fine houses, and buildings, and carriages, and beautiful things, and busy people, buying and selling, and making money. But how sad it is to see, when we walk about the streets of these great cities, that many of the people in them are thinking only of worldly business, and

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worldly pleasures; and that they care nothing about God, and heaven, and their own souls. These rich cities cannot have God's blessing. God is angry with the people who live in them, as he was with the wicked people who lived in Nineveh.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, and warn the people of their sins, and tell them how angry he was. But Jonah did not like to obey. Why not? Was he not glad to be useful, and to do the work which God gave him to do? No.

He would not go to Nineveh; but he arose directly and went to Joppa; and there he found a ship just going to a place called Tarshish. Jonah was very glad when he saw the ship. Perhaps he thought, "I will go to Tarshish in that ship and then I shall be far away from Israel, and from the God of Israel, and he will give me no more messages to take to Nineveh." So this rebellious prophet paid the fare to the captain, and went into the ship, and sailed away. Jonah thought he was safe now, and far away from God; but he forgot that God is everywhere. His eye can see us wherever we are;

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we cannot hide from God. "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STORM.

God had seen Jonah's disobedience, and he was going to punish it. He let Jonah go into the ship, and sail away; but he was looking at him all the time; and now, when the ship was in the sea, and Jonah thought all was safe, his trouble began. Trouble always follows sin. When we do wrong, we must suffer for it. We cannot disobey God without making him angry; and then he punishes us for our sin.

How did God punish Jonah? He sent a great wind and storm upon the sea; the ship was blown about, and tossed upon the waves. The sailors were frightened. They threw their goods into the sea, to lighten the ship; for they did not care for anything they possessed now, they thought only how they could save their lives. And then these poor sailors began to pray for deliverance; but they did not know the true

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God who ruled the sea, and sent the storm. They all prayed to their own gods; idols which could not hear, nor help, nor save them. How sad it is to be in danger, and trouble, and not to know God, who alone can help us then!

But where was Jonah? Did not he pray? He knew the true God. Did he now ask for pardon for his disobedience, and pray that God would quiet the storm, and save the poor frightened men? No; Jonah knew nothing about the storm; he had gone down to the bottom of the ship, and there he lay asleep. The noise of the storm did not frighten him; the cries and prayers of the sailors did not wake him. God had sent the storm to punish Jonah; and yet Jonah knew and cared nothing about it. Why was this? Because Jonah was so hardened in his sin, that he did not care to think whether God was angry or not. Jonah's sleep was not that peaceful happy sleep which God gives to his own obedient people. Those people who have God's smile upon them, may sleep safely in any danger; they need not fear, for God's hand is over them to keep them. But Jonah's sleep was not like theirs. He slept in carelessness and rebellion against God; God's

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frown was upon him; and, if Jonah had perished then, where would his soul have gone? But God in mercy spared his disobedient prophet. The ship-master came to Jonah, and awoke him, and said, "Why sleepest thou? Arise and call upon thy God; and pray to him to save us, that we perish not." Jonah arose directly, and when he saw his danger, he began to feel frightened. He knew why the storm came, but the sailors did not; and so they said, "Let us cast lots, that we may know why this storm is come upon us. Perhaps one of us has done something wrong, and this danger is sent to punish him. We will cast lots, and find who the wicked man is." So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. God made it fall upon him, that all the sailors might know his sin; and that Jonah himself might feel and confess it.

When the sailors saw that Jonah had the lot, they all said to him, "Tell us now the truth; why is this evil come? What hast thou done? Who art thou? Where is thy country? Who are thy people?" Jonah felt how much he had sinned, and did not try to deny, but confessed all the truth. This was right. When we have done wrong, and are sorry for it, we

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should at once confess it humbly. So Jonah said, "I am an Israelite; I am a servant of God, the true God, who made the dry land, and the sea, and who has now sent this storm; and I know he has sent it to punish me, because I have disobeyed his command, and tried to flee from his presence." Then the sailors asked, "What shall we do? How can we make the sea quiet again?" Jonah said, "You must take me, and throw me into the sea; and then it will be calm. I know the storm is sent for my sake, and it will not be calm while I am in the ship."

Jonah was willing to bear the punishment of his sin himself, and did not like the poor sailors to suffer for his sake; but they were very kind to him, and for a long while would not cast him into the sea. They rowed very hard, and tried to bring the ship to the land; but they could not. God had determined to punish Jonah, and he would not calm the storm while he was in the ship. Jonah told the sailors this, and asked them again to throw him into the sea. Then they all prayed to God, the true God, and asked him to forgive them for what they were going to do. They said, "Lord, thou hast done as it

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pleased thee. We do not wish this man to perish; we cast him into the sea, because he tells us it is thy will. Do not punish us for his death." Then the men took up Jonah, and threw him out of the ship into the sea; and he went down into the waters, and the men saw him no more. But as soon as the disobedient prophet was out of the ship, the wind and the storm were calmed; and thus God showed the ignorant sailors how great his power is. He showed them that it was he who sent the storm, and why he sent it. He made them feel that he is a holy God who sees sin, and punishes it; not like their foolish idols, which had no power to see nor to do any thing. The sailors felt all this, and began to fear the Lord very much, and to love him too. They offered sacrifices to God; and, we may hope, that they offered their sacrifices in the right way, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and looking in faith to him for the pardon of their sins. Then they made vows to God; and promised to love and serve him; and to worship their foolish idols no more.

The Bible tells us no more about this ship, and the men who sailed in it. Perhaps they went home to their own country, and told the

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people there of the wonderful God of Israel. The dreadful storm was sent in mercy to them, to turn their hearts to God; to teach them that he alone can make, and see, and do all things; that he must punish sin; but that he is always ready to have mercy, and to forgive those who truly turn to him.

CHAPTER XV.

JONAH SAVED.

Was Jonah drowned in the waves? No; God punished his disobedient servant for his sin; but he loved him still. He wished Jonah to feel his wickedness and repent; but he did not wish him to perish. When Jonah felt himself sinking deep into the sea, he thought he must die; he had no hope that he could be saved; but God could help Jonah, when Jonah could not help himself; and he helped him now in a very wonderful way. God had prepared a great fish to save him; and when Jonah was thrown into the sea, the fish was ready to receive him. It opened its mouth, and swallowed him; and he went down alive into the body of

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the fish. But God kept him alive. The fish went down to the bottom of the sea with Jonah; and there he lived, in the fish, three days and three nights. This was a sad gloomy prison. Perhaps Jonah thought he should never come out again, but die there in a dreadful way. What could he do in his trouble? He did what all people ought to do in trouble, he prayed to the Lord. He confessed his sin and asked for pardon. He prayed for deliverance; for he felt that only God could save him now. God attended to his humble cry, and spoke to the fish, and it cast out Jonah upon dry land. How surprised and how thankful, Jonah was now! How glad he was to feel himself upon dry ground again, and to see the bright sun shine, and the trees, and grass, and flowers, and to walk about in comfort, as he used to do! Jonah praised God for his mercy. And when we have been sick and near death, and God raises us up again let us remember to be, like Jonah, humble and thankful, and ready to give ourselves anew to God.

But had God forgotten Nineveh? No; he still remembered his command; and he called Jonah again, and said, "Arise, go to the great

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city Nineveh, and preach the preaching that I tell thee." Did Jonah obey? Yes; he was humbled now. He had learnt how foolish and dangerous it is to rebel against God and to flee from him; he knew that if he wanted God's blessing he must obey God's command; so he arose directly, and went to Nineveh.

God's ministers, in our days, often go to very distant countries to preach the gospel. They have many troubles, and many difficulties. The countries where they go are wicked countries, like Nineveh. The people who live there know nothing about God; they are ignorant idolaters. And, perhaps, these poor idolaters do not want the missionaries to come to them. Very often, they like their ignorance and their sins, and do not wish to be taught better. Perhaps they may not attend to the missionaries; perhaps they may hate, and persecute, and kill them. All this is very sad. How can missionaries like to go to these wicked countries? Why are they willing to leave their happy homes, and their dear friends, and go away to heathen lands? Because God has commanded them, as he commanded Jonah, to go and preach the preaching that he tells them. God does not speak to his

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ministers now by a voice from heaven; but he speaks to them in his Bible. They read there what Christ said to his disciples, just before he went up to heaven, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" and they rejoice to obey their Saviour's command.

CHAPTER XVI.

NINEVEH SPARED.

When Jonah came into the great city of Nineveh, he cried, and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." This was God's message, and a dreadful message it was. The people were very much frightened; for they knew that it came from God, and that God was very powerful, and could soon destroy them if he pleased. What could the Ninevites do? Their fine city could not help them; soon all must be thrown down. Their riches and possessions could do them no good; soon they would all be gone too. What could they do? Only one could save them now; only God himself; so the Ninevites determined to go to him in their sorrow. The king first gave the com-

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mand. He told the people to eat no food, and to drink no water; but to keep a fast all through the city, and to put on sackcloth; these were signs of mourning; and then, he commanded them all to cry unto God, and to turn from their wickedness, and to pray for pardon. Were the Ninevites right in doing this? Yes; countries, and wicked cities, and wicked people, should do all as these Ninevites did. But how can sinners turn to God? How can they give up their sins, and become holy? They cannot of themselves; they must ask grace from God. They must pray humbly to him; and look in faith to Jesus Christ who died to save them, and ask to have their sins washed away in his blood, and their hearts made new by the Holy Spirit. And will God hear these prayers? Yes; he promises to hear, and to forgive. He says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

The Ninevites did this. They turned from their wicked ways, and sought the Lord. And he saw their tears, and their prayers, and their

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sorrow for sin, and said in his great mercy, "I will spare Nineveh; I will not destroy it now." And God is still merciful to sinners. He says to them in the Bible, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; why will ye die?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GOURD.

Was not Jonah very glad that God spared Nineveh? No. The Bible tells us, "It displeased Jonah, and he was very angry." He said, "I knew Nineveh would be saved. I said so when I was in my own country, and therefore I fled to Tarshish. O Lord, take away my life it is better for me to die than live." What a sad temper this showed in Jonah! He loved himself, and his own ease and honour, better than he loved the poor people of Nineveh! He was angry, because God was merciful! Jonah asked to die; but was he ready to die then? Could he go to Heaven with this selfish unholy temper? God knew how wicked Jonah's heart.

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was; and, in mercy, he did not answer this foolish prayer; but he said to Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Then Jonah went a little way out of the city, and there he made a booth, and sat down under it. The climate of Nineveh was hot; and Jonah felt the heat very much, as he sat in his booth. But God was so kind to his discontented servant, that, in the night, he caused a gourd to grow up over Jonah; a shady plant to be a shelter over his head. God made this plant come up in one night; and the next day, Jonah sat under it in comfort, and was very glad of the gourd. How kind God was! But there was no kindness in Jonah. He was all selfishness, and discontent, and ingatitude. He sat under his gourd, angry with God, because he had spared Nineveh. Jonah loved himself very much; but he cared nothing for all the thousands of people in that great city. He did not thank God for his mercy in giving him the gourd, nor feel gratitude for it; so God took it away from him. God prepared a worm, the next morning, to eat into the root of the gourd; and when Jonah looked at his gourd again, he found it

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Jonah and the Gourd.—p. 70. ***

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withered and dead. The sun shone very brightly; and God sent a hot east wind, and the heat was very great, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah; for there was no gourd to shelter him now; and he began to faint, and asked again that he might die. Then God spoke to Jonah very kindly and gently. He told him of his sin, his wicked selfishness about Nineveh. He said to him, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? Dost thou think so much about this little plant, and nothing about Nineveh? Thou hast much pity for the gourd which only lived one day, and then perished; and shall I not have pity upon Nineveh, that great city, where there are more than 120,000 infants? Is the gourd worth more than they?"

The story of Jonah ends here. We may hope he repented of his sin, and tried afterwards to conquer his wicked temper. How wrong it is to love ourselves, and our own ease, and our own pleasure, more than we love our fellow-creatures! Pray, to be kind and affectionate, and full of love to all; and to be always ready to do them good, and to rejoice when they are happy. St. Paul says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

KING UZZIAH.

Uzziah was now king of Judah. He was only sixteen years old when he began to reign; and, like Joash, this young king reigned at first very well. He sought the Lord, and asked help from him; and God heard his prayer, and enabled him to do right. There was a good man living in Judah then, named Zechariah. He was a prophet; and God taught him by visions, and gave him understanding in holy things. And Uzziah served God all the time this good prophet lived.

God blessed Uzziah. He gave him strength to subdue the enemies of Judah; and everything that Uzziah did went on well. Why was this? Because he was seeking God in all he did. When Uzziah began any thing he asked God's help and blessing; and God directed him aright. Try, like Uzziah, to seek the Lord. Wherever you go, whatever you do, first ask God's blessing; and then all will go on well, and you will be happy and prosperous too. If you look to God for help, he will teach, and guide you.

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"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Uzziah did many things in his kingdom. He built towers, and had very much cattle; and a large army of soldiers. He made engines for shooting arrows and great stones; and all the people who lived near wondered when they heard of his strength, and riches, and power. All this was very pleasant to Uzziah; but his prosperity did him no real good; it led him away from God. Like Solomon, he grew forgetful of God when he grew rich. He became proud and in his pride, thought he might do as he pleased; and he went boldly into the temple of the Lord, to burn incense there. This was very wrong. The king was not the right person to burn incense: it was the business of the priests alone. When the priests saw Uzziah going into the holy place, they followed him, and said, "It is not right for thee, Uzziah, to burn incense. God has told the priests, that they alone may burn incense; go out of this holy place; do not disobey the command of God." Uzziah was very angry with the priests, and would not attend to them: but God him-

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self punished him for his sin. How did God punish Uzziah? He smote him with leprosy. The priests looked at the king while he was standing by the altar, and saw this dreadful leprosy rising in his forehead; and then they quickly took him out of the temple; for no leper might stay in that holy place. Uzziah himself was in haste to go out, when he felt how God had smitten and dishonoured him for his sin. We may hope that Uzziah truly repented, and humbled himself before God, and that God forgave him; but he was a leper all his life after. He lived in a house alone, and was not allowed to come into the holy temple. Uzziah had been very proud; now God humbled him, and made him feel how weak and helpless he was. He could not rule his people himself, nor attend to his kingdom; his son Jotham did all for him; and when Uzziah died, Jotham was made king. Learn what a sad sin pride is, and how angry it makes God. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST KINGS OF ISRAEL.

WHO was reigning now in Israel? Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam the second. He was a wicked man, and an idolater, like all the other kings of Israel. God had promised Jehu, that his sons should reign in Israel till the fourth generation; and God remembered this promise. Four of the family of Jehu reigned after him; we have read something about them all. The promise of God was now fulfilled, and he allowed no more of this wicked family to reign in Israel. Shallum made a conspiracy against Zechariah, and killed him, and reigned himself. But Shallum was slain a month after, by Menahem, and then Menahem was made king. He, too, was very wicked. God did not now bless his people and their kings; for they had forgotten him, and served new gods, and were growing worse and worse, more and more wicked every year. But God, in mercy, still spared them. He did not destroy them; but often he sent troubles to punish them for their sin. The king of Assyria came

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with an army against Israel. Menahem did not wish to fight; so he demanded money from all his people, and gathered together a great deal of silver, and gave it to the king of Assyria, and asked him not to fight against Israel. So the king of Assyria took the money, and went home to his own country.

After Menahem's death, another wicked king reigned in Israel, Pekahiah, the son of Menahem. But after two years, Pekah, his captain, conspired against him, and killed him; and then Pekah became king. He was a very wicked man, and his reign was a sad time in Israel. A new king of Assyria came, and took a great many cities, and carried captives many of the Israelites. After this, a man named Hoshea, made a conspiracy against Pekah, and killed him, and made himself king. Hoshea was the last king of Israel. We shall soon read the end of the kingdom, and the captivity of the ten tribes.

How dreadful it is to live in a country where God is not feared; where the people think only of their riches, and their pleasures, and do not care about holy things. We ought to be thankful that we are in a country where God is wor-

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shipped and feared; but there are many, even here, who, like the Israelites, do not care for the holy things they are taught, and will not attend to the Bible, nor to God's faithful ministers. Let us pray for our country, and ask God to send his blessing upon us all. Then this will be a happy country, and we shall be a happy people; for God's blessing, and that alone, can make a country and people truly happy.

CHAPTER XX.

JOTHAM AND AHAZ.

JOTHAM, king of Judah, was a very good king. He did right; but his people went on in their own wicked ways, and did not wish to be like him. This must have troubled Jotham very much; but he trusted in God, and sought comfort in him, and God strengthened and blessed him. Jotham built a great many cities in the mountains of Judah, and towers and castles in the forests. Then he fought with the Ammonites, and conquered them; and Jotham prospered in all he did, and because "He prepared his way before the Lord his God." We

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may learn something from the history of this good king. We have not kingdoms to rule, nor cities to build, nor battles to fight, as he had; but we all have some work, some business to do; and when we begin this work, we ought, like Jotham, to ask God's blessing. We should pray God to keep us from beginning any thing wrong, and to help us in doing what is right. Then, all we do will prosper; we shall be active and busy, but we shall remember that we are the servants of God, and try to please him in all things. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."

After Jotham's death, Ahaz his son was made king of Judah. Ahaz was not like his father; he was a very wicked man. Good parents can not make their children good; but God is very angry with those wicked children, who, like Ahaz, do not attend to the advice and holy example which their good parents give them. Ahaz worshipped images, and the gods of the heathen nations, and sacrificed to them, and burnt his children in the fire before these idols. Was not God very angry with Ahaz for this dreadful wickedness? Yes; and he soon punished him for it. The king of Syria came, and

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fought against Ahaz, and took many of the people prisoners and carried them away to Damascus. And some were slain by Pekah king of Israel, and others were taken captive to Samaria.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAPTIVITY OF THE TEN TRIBES.

THE time was now coming when God must punish rebellious Israel more dreadfully than he had punished them before. Many years before, God had given Jeroboam the ten tribes and promised that if they would obey and serve him the kingdom of Israel should belong to Jeroboam's children for many generations. But Jeroboam and his sons disobeyed God and then they were destroyed, and the kingdom was given to others. The new kings were as wicked as Jeroboam, and therefore they were destroyed too. All this was a warning to Israel, to teach them how God punishes sin; but they did not attend to the warning. The kings and the people grew worse and worse. They forsook God and made idols and worshipped them. God spared these wicked people a long

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time, for he wished them to repent, and turn to him. Sometimes he sent his holy prophets to teach and warn them; but the people would not attend. Sometimes he sent enemies to fight against them for their sins. The people of Israel were often in great trouble, and then they went to God for help, and prayed him to deliver them; and he very often heard their prayers, and saved them from their enemies. But when the danger was past, then Israel forgot their kind God, and went back to their sins and their idols again. They had done this many times, and now God was very angry, and said he would spare them no longer, but take away their kingdom, and send them captives into a distant land.

When Hoshea was reigning, Shalmaneser, king of Assyria came to Samaria, and besieged it three years. At last, he took the city, and carried away the people who were in it to Assyria, and put them in the cities there. Samaria was left without any inhabitants; but Shalmaneser sent some of his people from Assyria and placed them in Samaria, and they lived there and possessed it, while the poor Israelites were far away from their own home. These

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new people who lived in Samaria, knew nothing of the true God. They were idolaters, and at first they worshipped only the foolish idols they had worshipped in Assyria. This made God very angry, and he soon taught them how powerful he was. He sent lions among them, and the lions killed many of the people. Then the people began to be frightened, and they said to the king of Assyria, "We do not know the God of this country; we have been worshipping our own gods, and have made him angry and he has sent lions to slay us, because we do not serve him; what must we do?" Then the king of Assyria sent to them one of the priests who had been carried captive from Israel and said, "He will teach you how to serve the Lord." So the priest of Israel came from Assyria, and lived at Bethel, and taught the people to fear the Lord.

Did the new inhabitants of Samaria give up their idols, and worship the true God with all their hearts? No; they learned a little about God, but they did not truly love him, nor rightly understood how to serve him. They said, "We will worship Israel's God, and our own gods too." Then they built altars, and

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made priests, and offered sacrifices, sometimes to God, and sometimes to their idols; and they offered their children to these idols, and burnt them in the fire. This worship was very displeasing to God. He must have all the heart, all the service, all the love of his people. He will not bless those who think they may serve God and idols too;—God and the world; God and their sins; God and their own foolish pleasures. Many people think they may do this now, as the foolish inhabitants of Samaria thought; but the Bible says, no, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Did the ten tribes ever return to Canaan? No; years passed away, generation after generation died, and still the Israelites were far away from their own beloved home. They stayed in distant lands; they were scattered over many countries, to warn nations, and to teach them how fearful it is to displease God. Many, many long years the people of Israel have been without a home, and without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without God's blessing, and without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Where are they now? They are scattered in many parts of the

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East; in Egypt, and in Persia, and in many other countries, we know not where. But God has not forgotten them. His eye has been upon them all these years; he has kept them apart from the nations where they live, and preserved them in all their dangers, and sorrows, and troubles.

CHAPTER XXII.

HEZEKIAH.

HEZEKIAH was now king of Judah. He was son of Ahaz, but he was not like his father; Hezekiah was a holy man. When he began to reign, the kingdom of Judah was in a sad state. The holy temple of God was shut up; idol altars were in all the high places; incense was burnt to new gods, and sacrifices offered to them, and not to the Lord, the true God. Ahaz had done this; but Hezekiah began to undo it all directly, for he knew it was his duty, as king, to teach and command the people to serve God. So first, Hezekiah called together the priests and the Levites, because it was their business to take care of God's temple

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and service, and of the holy things. He spoke very solemnly to the priests and Levites, and yet very affectionately, like a kind father.

Hezekiah said, "Hear what I am going to tell you. Our fathers forsook God, and worshipped idols, and shut up the holy temples, and burnt no incense, and offered no sacrifices to God. All this has made him angry, and he has sent trouble and sorrow upon Judah, to punish his people for their sin. Now, my sons, let us return to God, and serve him with all our hearts. Now then, arise and serve him. Put away these idols, and let us make a covenant with our God, and then we shall have his blessing, and his anger will be turned away." The priests and Levites attended to what their good king said, and willingly obeyed him. They went directly to the house of God, and took away all the idolatrous things and destroyed them. Among these things was the brazen serpent which Moses had made in the wilderness. The foolish people honored this serpent very much, and burnt incense to it. They forgot him of whom it was a type, the Lord Jesus Christ; and honored this piece of brass, which could not hear, nor see, nor do them any good.

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How foolish people are, when they go on in the ways of their own hearts, and do not seek to be taught by God! There are people now, in Christian countries, as foolish as the people of Judah. The Roman catholics bow down before crucifixes, and give them the honor which belongs only to God. Thus they disobey the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not make any graven images; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them." Hezekiah commanded the brazen serpent to be taken away; and he broke it in pieces, to show the people that it was only a piece of brass without power to help them.

All was now ready; the temple was cleansed; the altars, and the tables, and the shew bread, and the holy things, were in their right places. Then Hezekiah rose very early in the morning, and called the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord. Why? Because they were going to offer sacrifices there; to confess their sins, and to pray for forgiveness. They brought bullocks and rams, and lambs, and goats, for a sin offering for the kingdom; and Hezekiah commanded the priests to offer all these animals on the altar of the Lord.

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There was great joy in Judah at this time. The Levites played, and sung psalms of praise to God; and all the people sounded the trumpets, and shouted for joy; and good Hezekiah rejoiced too, when he saw his people praising and serving God. What made them all so happy? Because they had received God's pardon and God's blessing. They were not happy, before. Sin makes people miserable. When God's frown is upon them, they cannot be happy, they have no right to rejoice. They have no real joy, no true peace then. And how can sinners be made happy? As Judah and Hezekiah were made happy. We need not, indeed, offer sacrifices now, as they did. The one great sacrifice, of which all the others were types, has been offered. Jesus Christ was that sacrifice and we want no more. But we must come to him in faith, confessing our sin, and feeling how weak and helpless we are, and that we have no power to save ourselves; and we must ask him to have mercy upon us. Then God will hear, and forgive, and bless us, as he did the people of Judah; and we may rejoice as they did, and praise him for all his goodness.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PASSOVER KEPT.

THE next thing Hezekiah did, was to call all the people to keep the passover. We read about the Passover a long time ago. Why was it kept? It was in remembrance of that wonderful day in which God brought his people Israel out of Egypt. God then sent an angel to destroy the firstborn of all his enemies; but the angel passed over the doors on which the lamb's blood was sprinkled, and did not destroy those within. God commanded his people to keep the feast of the Passover every year. But the people of Israel and Judah had long forgotten this command. They had not kept the feast of the Passover for a great many years. This was very wrong; and Hezekiah told them how wrong it was, and commanded them now to come to Jerusalem, and keep the Passover again. He wrote letters, and sent them through all his kingdom, and into Israel also. The posts went from tribe to tribe, and

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from city to city, through the land. Were the people willing to come? Some were very glad to come; but others refused, and laughed at Hezekiah's command, and would not attend to it. These were wicked, thoughtless people, who did not care for God and holy things. Many people now are like these careless Israelites. Very often when God's ministers call sinners to attend to holy things, and to think about their souls, and God, and Christ, and Heaven, they turn away, and laugh, and will not listen. How wicked and foolish such people are! When they come to die, they will feel how dreadful it is to know nothing of God, and not to be ready when he calls them away.

But the people of Judah, and some of the people of Israel, attended directly to Hezekiah's letters, and came to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the Passover. Then the Levites killed the lamb for the people and the priests sprinkled the blood, and Hezekiah prayed for his people, and said, "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God." And God did pardon all those who

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sought him in truth, and who looked in faith to Jesus for forgiveness. The passover was another type of Christ. The blood of the lamb saved the Israelites from the destroying angel. Christ is our passover: he was sacrificed to save us from worse destruction—from perishing for ever in hell.

The people kept the feast seven days; singing, and praising the Lord, and rejoicing, and making confession before God. And good Hezekiah blessed them all, and spoke comfortably to the Levities who taught the good knowledge of the Lord. Did they go away when the seven days were ended? No; they felt so happy in God's service that they all wished to stay seven days more. Then they rejoiced again, and praised the Lord every day; all Jerusalem was full of joy; holy joy, not foolish mirth, but true happiness, because they were serving God, and he was blessing them. At last, the days of the feast were all ended, and the people went home. They were sorry to go; they were not tired of serving and praising God, but they had families and business at home, and they knew it was their duty to attend to them.

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How happy those people are who serve the Lord with all their hearts! God's service ought to be our greatest pleasure. When we are praising him, we are doing what happy spirits do in heaven. But we cannot now serve God as we should wish. We often grow tired and weary; and we have worldly business, and cares, and troubles, which prevent us from praising God as we ought to do. But in heaven we shall praise him for ever. We shall never be tired there.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

SENNACHERIB'S ARMY DESTROYED.

We have been reading about Hezekiah's happiness, now we must read about his troubles. All people in this world must have trouble sometimes; God's people, and wicked people too. But when God sends trouble to his people, he sends it in love. He sends it to teach them to trust in him more, and to love him more; and he can comfort them in all their sorrows, and deliver them if he pleases.

But what was Hezekiah's trouble? There was a king of Assyria, named Sennacherib. He was a very wicked king, and he did not like Hezekiah to enjoy his kingdom in peace. Sennacherib wished to take possession of Judah, and to reign over it himself. So he made ready a large army, and sent it against Jerusalem, with Rabshakeh his captain. When Hezekiah saw the army coming, he sent some of his great men out to speak to Rabshakeh, and ask him why he was come. Then Rabshakeh told them his master's message, and a very wicked mes-

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sage it was. "Thus saith the great king of Assyria; I am come to this land to destroy it. Who can deliver you from my hand? Can the king of Egypt? Do you trust in him? He has no power to help you. Does your king Hezekiah tell you to trust in God? Does he say, the Lord will deliver you? Do not attend to Hezekiah. God cannot deliver you. I have fought against many nations, and conquered them. Their gods could not save them; and how can your God save you? Attend to me; serve me, and do not hearken to Hezekiah."

The men of Judah heard Sennacherib's message, but they made no answer; for Hezekiah had told them not to give an answer to Rabshakeh, but to come back directly. When Hezekiah heard the message, he was very much troubled. He rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, as signs of his great sorrow, and went into the house of the Lord, and told all his troubles to God. Hezekiah knew that God was stronger than Sennacherib, and that he was his friend, and could hear his prayer, and deliver him from his enemies.

When Hezekiah had prayed to God, he sent to the good prophet Isaiah, to ask for advice

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from him. Hezekiah's messengers came to Isaiah covered with sackcloth, and full of sorrow. They said, "Thus saith Hezekiah, this is a day of trouble and sorrow. The king of Assyria has sent Rabshakeh to speak blasphemy against God. But it may be, the Lord will hear the wicked words of Rabshakeh, and deliver his people; and we ask thy prayer for those who are left." God had told Isaiah what to say to Hezekiah; he had a message of comfort for these poor, sorrowing people. Isaiah said, "Tell your master not to fear the words of Rabshakeh. God himself will deliver you from this great army. The king of Assyria shall not hurt Jerusalem; he shall not shoot an arrow there, nor come against it with shields. God will defend the city, and smite the Assyrian army, and make their king return to his own land; and there he shall fall by the sword."

Then the messengers returned, and told Hezekiah what Isaiah had said; and Hezekiah believed in God, and trusted all to him, and was comforted. And was the army of Assyria destroyed? Yes; but not by Hezekiah, nor by his soldiers, nor his people. They all waited quietly that night for God to deliver them.

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And, in the night, God sent out his destroying angel to the army of the Assyrians. These wicked men were all asleep in their camp, little thinking of the punishment that was coming. They did not care for God; they laughed at his power, and at his people, and thought they were safe, and feared nothing. But while they were lying asleep in their camp, the destroying angel came down from heaven, and went from tent to tent, and smote all the soldiers of that large army; 185,000 were slain, without time to repent, and ask for pardon!

The people of Judah arose in the morning, and looked towards their enemies' camp. What did they see? No cruel enemies were there now; no wicked Rabshakeh speaking blasphemy against God. All was quiet. The bodies of the Assyrians were lying dead upon the ground; their souls were gone to appear before the great God whom they had despised and blasphemed. Sennacherib himself returned to his own country, but he did not live there long. Soon after, when he was worshipping in the temple of his idol god, his sons rushed in, and smote him, and killed him. What a sad end of Sennacherib and all his army! How

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dreadful it is to despise God, and rebel against him! He will, sooner or later, punish all his enemies. They cannot always resist his power. He will say to them at last, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish," and send them away from his presence for ever.

CHAPTER XXV.

HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS.

Soon after God had delivered Hezekiah from the Assyrian army, the good king became very, very ill; so ill that he thought he must soon die. The kind prophet Isaiah came to him, and said, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." This was a very solemn message. It is an awful thing to die. To go away from the world, and from our friends, and never to see them here again. Hezekiah felt this; and when Isaiah told him to prepare for death, he "Turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord." Hezekiah had long loved and served God; his sins had been washed

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away, and his heart had been made new. But when he thought that death was so near, he felt that he wanted strength and comfort, and he knew who alone could give them. When he had been in trouble and difficulty before, he had sought God in his house. But Hezekiah could not go there now; he thought he should never go to God's temple again. But God was with Hezekiah still, and could hear his prayers on a sick bed, and comfort him there as he had done in the temple. Hezekiah wept very much when he prayed. Was he sorry to die? He could not be sorry to leave a wicked world, and go to his home in Heaven; but, perhaps, he was sorry when he remembered his kingdom, and the people whom he loved so much, to think that, after his death, they might have a king who would not teach them rightly, and that they might fall into sin and idolatry again. Hezekiah had been very useful. He had done much good in Judah, and he wanted to do more. It is sad when holy people are taken away from their usefulness; but we must remember, that it is God who calls them away, and that all he does is best. God's people should be willing to go, and their friends will-

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ing to part with them, whenever this is God's will. Hezekiah wept, but he did not murmur. He was ready to submit to God, and left all to him.

And did Hezekiah die? No; it pleased God to spare his life. God had more work for him to do, and he told him, by the prophet Isaiah, that he would add to his life fifteen years. This message surprised the king very much; he did not disbelieve God's promise, but he wanted to be still more assured of it; so he asked Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord again?" Isaiah answered, "God will give thee a sign upon yonder sun-dial. Shall the shadow there go forward ten degrees, or shall it go back ten degrees?" Hezekiah said, "Let the shadow go back ten degrees." Then Isaiah cried to the Lord, and asked him to give this sign to king Hezekiah. And God did as he asked. The king looked at the sun-dial, and he saw the shadow on it moving; but the shadow did not move forward as usual. It went back ten degreess, and then it stopped upon a degree it had passed long before. It was a miracle which God alone could do; and he

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was pleased to do it to strengthen the faith of Hezekiah, and to convince him that the God who could bring back the shadow on the dial, could bring Hezekiah back also to life and health again.

Hezekiah was now well, and the first thing he did after his recovery, was to go to the house of the Lord. There he thanked his merciful God who had so wonderfully healed him, and gave himself up again to his service. When we are raised from illness this is what we should do. First, thank God who has healed us, and then ask him to help us to love and serve him better than we did before.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

HEZEKIAH'S PRIDE.

HEZEKIAH wrote a beautiful song of praise after his recovery, thanking God for his great mercy. All the people of Judah rejoiced when they saw their king restored to them again; it was a time of great joy in Jerusalem, and other people rejoiced too in his recovery. The king of Babylon wrote letters to Hezekiah, and sent him a present. Hezekiah was pleased to see the messengers of the king of Babylon. He was very kind to them, and gave them all they wished, and showed them his possessions; his gold, and silver, and armour, and houses, and every thing he had. Was this right? It was right to be kind and hospitable. The Bible tells us to be so. But Hezekiah felt very proud when he showed his riches to the messengers of the king of Babylon, and that was wrong. He wanted them to praise him, and to go home and tell their master what a great king Hezekiah was. This was pride; it was love of the world,

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and of worldly things, and worldly praise. We are commanded not to seek the praise of men, but the praise of God; not to seek to please men, but to please God. Hezekiah did not please God now.

The messengers went away; and, perhaps, Hezekiah soon forgot his sin; but God had not forgotten it. He had seen all. He had looked into the heart of Hezekiah when he was showing his riches, to the messengers, and had seen there all Hezekiah's pride and foolish vanity; and now, he was going to punish his sinful servant. One day, Isaiah came to see Hezekiah; but he did not look upon Hezekiah as he used to look. He looked very grave, and very solemn. Then Isaiah asked, "Who were those men who came to Jerusalem? From whence came they?" Hezekiah answered, "They came from a very distant country, from Babylon." Isaiah asked again, "What have they seen in thy house?" Perhaps Hezekiah began now to feel his sin, and to be ashamed of it, but he did not try to deny, or excuse it. He confessed directly, "I have shown them every thing in my house." Then Isaiah said, "Hear the words of the Lord: Very soon, all

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these riches which thou hast laid up, shall be taken away to Babylon, and thy sons shall be carried captive, and they shall be servants to the king of Babylon." This was the punishment of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah felt his sin and submitted humbly to the punishment. He asked for pardon and for grace to be humble, and to love the world less, and God more. And God in mercy heard his prayer, and told him, that evil should not yet come upon the land of Judah. This comforted Hezekiah, and he thanked God, and said, "There shall be peace and truth in my days." This story ought to teach us how weak and sinful we all are, Hezekiah was a good man; but when he was left to himself, when he trusted to his own strength and goodness, and forgot to ask for God's grace, he began to sin directly. We have in ourselves no power to do what is right. Our hearts are full of pride, and of every other sin, which God alone can help us to subdue. Jesus Christ says, "Without me ye can do nothing."

The fifteen years passed away and then the time came when Hezekiah must die. And he was willing to die now; he did not wish more

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years added to his life. He had had enough of the world, and was glad to leave its sins, and follies and vanities, and to go to his home in Heaven.

We do not know when we shall die. God has not told us, as he told Hezekiah, how many years longer we shall live. Perhaps we may live fifteen years, or more; perhaps we may die this year. We cannot tell. But are we ready to die? Have our sins been repented of, and forgiven? Have our hearts been made new by God's Holy Spirit? Do we love God better than all the world, and are we trying to serve him in all we do? If not, we cannot be ready to die, and this is a very awful thought. Death may come in a moment; and where will the soul go then, if it is not prepared for Heaven? Seek to be ready for death. Seek now, not next year, nor next month, but *now*, because death may come very, very soon, and it may be too late to repent and pray then. The Bible says, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

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CHAPTER XXVII.

MANASSEH.

MANASSEH, Hezekiah's son, now reigned over Judah. He was not like his good father; he was an idolater, and built again the idol altars which Hezekiah had thrown down. He worshipped the sun, and moon, and stars; he burnt his children in sacrifice to idols, and set up an image in God's holy temple. The people of Judah sooon learnt to do as Manasseh did, and all the country became again full of idolatry, and rebellion against God. God warned Manasseh and his people; he spoke to them by his prophets; but this wicked nation would not attend to the warning. Then punishment came; all those troubles of which Isaiah had spoken to Hezekiah. The king of Assyria sent, and took Manasseh prisoner, and bound him in chains, and brought him to Babylon.

Manasseh now felt how dreadful it is to sin against God. He thought of his past sins; his wicked idolatry, and forgetfulness of the true God. And then, perhaps, he remembered his

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good father, and all the holy lessons Hezekiah had taught him many years before. Manasseh had not then cared for the things which Hezekiah loved so much. He had been, perhaps, a rebellious, disobedient child, and had given his kind father much trouble and sorrow. But Hezekiah had often prayed that God would have mercy on his poor son; and now, after so many years, when Hezekiah was in his grave, God answered his prayers. Manasseh repented in his captivity. His sorrows brought him to God. "When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him."

And did God hear Manasseh's prayer? Yes, God is so merciful, that he will hear and pardon all who truly repent. He casts out none who come to him, if they believe in him. God heard and blessed Manasseh. He delivered him from his trouble, and brought him home to his own kingdom again; and Manasseh reigned in peace in Jerusalem. He did not reign now as he had reigned before. Manasseh had learnt, "That the Lord he was God;" so he took away the idols, and threw down the altars, and com-

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manded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. The last part of Manasseh's life was happy. Why? Because Manasseh was at peace with God, and had his blessing. And when Manasseh died, and his body was laid in the grave, then his soul went to heaven, where his dear father had gone before. How Hezekiah must have rejoiced to see his once rebellious son there, pardoned and accepted of God; all his sins washed away in the blood of Jesus, and his soul saved for ever! And how Manasseh must have thanked and praised God for his mercy, in sending trouble and sorrow to bring him to repentance; and for pardoning all his sin!

Amon, Manasseh's son, reigned now in Judah. He worshipped idols, as his father had done at first; but Amon did not, like his father, repent of his sins, and humble himself before God. He grew worse and worse; and at last his servants conspired against him, and slew him, and made his son Josiah king of Judah.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TEMPLE REPAIRED.

JOSIAH was a little boy when he began to reign; only eight years old. We have read before of many little boys who began when they were very young to love and fear the Lord; and Josiah was like those good children. The Bible tells us "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." But how could Josiah know what was right? The Bible tells us this too. It was because Josiah was taught of God. "While he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father;" and God, who had taken care of David, and loved and blessed him all his life, heard the prayer of young Josiah, and loved and blessed him also. God gave him his Holy Spirit to teach him to do right and to rule his kingdom well. Josiah was ignorant, and weak, and sinful like other children; it was the Spirit of God, not his own wisdom, and strength, and goodness, that made him do right in the sight of the Lord. How happy Josiah was, to have

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a heavenly father to keep and guide him, when his earthly father was dead? He was a happy child, because he was a holy child. And may not children now be as holy and as happy as Josiah was? Yes, if they seek to be so, as he sought. God is as willing to attend to children now, as he was when Josiah lived. He will hear the prayers of every child who humbly seeks him. He still says, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me."

When Josiah grew older, he was anxious to do all he could for the service of God; and he commanded that the holy temple should be repaired. Money was collected from the people who came to God's house; and this money was given to carpenters, and masons, and builders, and they bought wood and stone, and began to repair the temple. The money given to these men was not counted. The king and the priests knew that the workmen were faithful and honest, and that they would not steal nor waste the money; for they were the servants of God, and remembered always that his eye was upon them.

All people who are trusted with money,

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should be like these faithful workmen. Servants are sometimes entrusted with their masters' money. They are to buy something with it, perhaps, and to give back what is left carefully and honestly. They may be alone; their masters and mistresses may be far away; and some dishonest servants may be tempted to keep part of the money for themselves, and deceive their masters; but they cannot deceive God. Their masters may trust them, and, like Josiah, not care to count the money. But God knows all. He can see all the deceit of the heart, and he will at last punish those servants for their unfaithfulness, and their dishonesty. Servants ought to remember that that they have a master in heaven, who can see them when no earthly master can, who knows all the thoughts of their hearts. If they are God's servants, they will be faithful and honest to their earthly masters and mistresses: "Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

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Josiah.—p. 109.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

JOSIAH.

When Hilkiah, the priest, went into the house of the Lord to bring out the money, he found there the book of the law of God; and he carefully brought it out, and sent it to the king. Josiah honoured this book very much, because it was the book of God; his holy law was written in it. Josiah told one of his servants to read the book to him; and he listened to it very attentively, and very reverently. This is what we ought to do when we have the Bible read to us; and when we read it to ourselves, we should remember that it is God's word, and attend to it very solemnly, and seek to understand it. But when Josiah had heard the book read, he began to weep; and he rent his clothes, and was in very great trouble. Why was this? What did God's law say to him to make him so unhappy? It told him of God's holiness and hatred of sin, and especially of the evils which he would inflict upon the nation if,

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they disobeyed his commands. Josiah felt that he and his people had many times disobeyed God; and he was afraid that soon God might punish them, because they had done so much to make him angry. This thought made Josiah tremble, and rend his clothes. And when sinners read the Bible now, there is much to frighten and make them tremble too. We read there that "All have sinned," and "the soul that sinneth it shall die." This is very fearful indeed. Must we all perish, perish forever in hell? We all deserve to perish; the Bible tells us so; but this is not all the Bible says. It tells us also of God's mercy; it tells us how sinners may be saved; "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He "was once offered to bear the sins of many." His blood "cleanseth us from all sin." The Bible says to every one of us, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

There was a good woman living at Jerusalem, named Huldah. She was a prophetess; and God honoured her very much in making known his will to her by his Spirit. When Josiah was in so much trouble after reading

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God's law, he sent messengers to Huldah to ask her advice. God had seen all Josiah's trouble; he knew all his thoughts, and he had sent a message of comfort for him to the prophetess Huldah. She told the messengers, that God was indeed angry with the people of Judah, and that he would surely punish them as his law threatened; but that he was not angry with Josiah. He said to him, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me, I have heard thee, saith the Lord. Thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see the evil that I will bring upon this place." This comforted Josiah. What a blessing it is to have God for our friend! Then we need never fear; for he will always be with us, to keep, and bless, and comfort us. If he please, he can preserve us from all evil; or he can take us away from it, as he took away Josiah, in peace. "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace."

Josiah read the law of God to the people. He made a holy covenant with God, to love

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and serve him with all his heart; and then he made his people promise that they too would serve the Lord. The people were willing and obedient; and they put away their idols, and said, "We will serve the Lord." Then Josiah threw down the idol altars, and broke in pieces the images, and destroyed the altar which Jeroboam had set up in Bethel.

After the idols were destroyed, Josiah kept the feast of the Passover, with all his people in Jerusalem. This good king taught his subjects the right way; and God blessed him in what he did, and his country was peaceful and happy, many years. But after all this, the king of Egypt fought against Assyria, and Josiah went out to resist him. It was wrong and foolish of Josiah to join in this war without God's direction; and he was punished for his folly; —he was killed in the battle. His body was brought to Jerusalem; and all the people wept over it, because they loved and honoured their king very much. The prophet Jeremiah wrote a beautiful song about Josiah, and the singers lamented over him. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, the good priest, of whom we have been reading. The death of Josiah was a sad

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thing for his people, but it was the happiest and best thing for Josiah. He was safe now from all the evils that were coming on his country. His body was quietly resting in the grave, and his soul was in that happy place where no evil can come, and where so many of his fathers had gone before.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WARNING BY JEREMIAH.

After the death of Josiah, the people made his son, Jehoahaz, king of Judah. He was unlike his father; he was a wicked man, and did evil in the sight of the Lord. Jehoahaz did not reign long. Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, came to Jerusalem, and made Jehoahaz prisoner and carried him away to Egypt and Jehoahaz died there; and the king of Egypt made another son of Josiah king of Judah. His name was Jehoiakim; he was wicked and rebellious, like his brother Jehoahaz.

And now the time was coming for God to

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punish his sinful and ungrateful people. He had spared them many, many years. He had given them time to repent; he had warned them by his prophets; he had invited them to return to him; he had promised to bless them if they would obey him; but no—they would not attend. Still God was waiting in mercy and now he sent one more messenger to warn them of their danger, and to tell them to repent and turn to God. This messenger was the prophet Jeremiah. God commanded him to stand in the court of the temple, and speak to all the people who came to worship there. What did Jeremiah say to them? This was his message; "Thus saith the Lord; If ye will not hearken unto me, and unto the words of my servants the prophets, I will destroy this house and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."

Did the people attend to what Jeremiah said? They heard what he said; but they were not willing to receive the warning which God sent them. The message made them angry, but it did not humble them. They disliked reproof, and were angry with the messenger who brought it. When Jeremiah had finished speaking, the priests and the people

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and the prophets took him, and said, "Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou said that this house shall be destroyed, and that this city shall be thrown down?" Then the people assembled, and the princes of Judah came from the king's house, and they all sat down at the gate of the temple, to talk about Jeremiah and the message he had brought them. The priests and the prophets were more angry than the rest. They ought to have taught the people to fear and serve the Lord; but these priests and prophets were proud, rebellious, unholy men. They sinned against God themselves, and they encouraged the people in sin too. They honoured their temple, and loved their city; but they did not honour the God of the temple; they did not love him who had kept their city in safety so many years.

These priests offered sacrifices and burnt-offerings to the Lord; but their sacrifices were not accepted, because not offered in faith. The prophets read God's holy law; but their knowledge of the law was of no use, for they read, but did not obey. God will not accept our services if we are not sincere;—if we do

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not truly love and wish to serve him. He sees the heart. If there is no faith, and no love *there*, God will not attend to the prayers we say. And if we do not ask for the Holy Spirit to teach us, we shall have no blessing when we read his word.

Jeremiah stood quietly before his judges. They were stronger than he, but he was not afraid. He knew it was his duty to speak the truth boldly for God, and he prayed for courage to do so. God gave him the boldness and courage he needed; and when the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and people, saying, "This man deserves to die, because he has prophesied evil against our city;" Jeremiah cried out to them all, "It is God who sent me to prophesy these things; he has spoken the words you have heard, and what he says is truth. If you wish your city and your temple to be spared, you must amend your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord; and then he will have mercy, and will not bring this evil upon you. I am in your power; do with me as you please. But know, that if you put me to death, you will bring worse punishment upon yourselves, and upon

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your city, because what I have spoken is the word of God.

And did the wicked priests and prophets put Jeremiah to death? No; God inclined the hearts of the princes and people to attend to Jeremiah. He made them fear to hurt his prophet; and they said to the priests, "No; this man does not deserve to die. He has spoken to us in the name of God." Then some of the elders arose up, and said, "Many years ago, Micah prophesied that this city should be destroyed, because of the wickedness of the people. Hezekiah was king when Micah prophesied this. But Hezekiah and his people did not put Micah to death. They were not angry with him for speaking the truth. They believed what he said, and repented, and feared the Lord, and besought him to have mercy on them; and God heard their prayer, and spared them. Let us do as they did; and not kill Jeremiah, and bring God's anger upon us."

There was another prophet of the Lord, who prophesied as Jeremiah did, named Urijah. The wicked king Jehoiakim slew him with the sword; but Jeremiah was kept by his friends, and his enemies did not hurt him at that time.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ROLL BURNT.

Once again, God told Jeremiah to warn the people of their sins, and of the punishments that were soon coming upon them. Jeremiah was now to write the warning in the roll of a book. It was written in mercy. God was still willing to spare his rebellious people, if they would turn to him. He said, "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." How merciful and patient God is with his sinful rebellious people!

Jeremiah called one of his friends a good man named Baruch, and asked him to write upon a roll all the words which God commanded. Jeremiah spoke the words, and Baruch wrote them down in the roll. When the book was finished, Jeremiah said to Baruch, "I am shut up; I cannot go to the house of the Lord. Go thou, and read the roll which thou hast written to all the people in the Lord's house.

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Perhaps they will attend to the warning, and turn from their wicked ways; and then God will forgive and spare them." Baruch did as Jeremiah commanded. He went to the gate of the Lord's house, and there he read the roll to all the people. One of the men who heard the roll read, was very attentive to the warning which God sent; and he went directly to the king's house, and told the princes all he had heard. Then the princes wanted to hear the roll too; so they sent for Baruch, and asked him to sit down, and read the book to them. The princes listened very attentively while Baruch was reading; and when he had finished, they said, "How didst thou write all these words?" Then Baruch answered, "Jeremiah pronounced the words, and I wrote them, as he commanded, with ink in the book." Then the princes said, "Go and hide, both thou and Jeremiah, and we will tell the king about the roll which we have heard. He ought to know the warning which God has sent to us." So the princes took the roll, and put it in a safe place; and Baruch returned to Jeremiah, and told him to hide himself; and then the princes

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went to the king Jehoiakim, and spoke to him of the fearful things they had heard.

Jehoiakim did not care for God's word, but he was curious to see the roll, and to know what Jeremiah had written; so he sent a messenger to fetch it. It was winter; and king Jehoiakim was sitting in his winter-house, with all his princes, and nobles, and servants round him; and the fire was burning on the hearth. The messenger soon came back, bringing the roll in his hand; and the king commanded him to read it aloud before all the company. Then the messenger began to read the fearful warning which was written in the roll. But when he had read two or three leaves, the wicked king began to be very angry with what he had heard. He did not like to be told of his sins, and of the punishments which were coming upon him and his kingdom. He did not attend humbly to God's merciful warning; nor repent, nor weep, as good king Josiah had done, when he heard God's law. No,—in his anger, Jehoiakim seized the roll, and cut it in pieces with his penknife, and threw it into the fire. Some of the princes begged the king not to burn

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the roll; but he would not attend to them. Then Jehoiakim sent some of his servents to take Jeremiah and Baruch; but God himself hid those good men, and their enemies could not find them.

Jehoiakim had burnt the roll, but he could not destroy the truth of God's words; he only brought worse evils upon himself. God told Jeremiah to take a new roll, and to write on it all the words of the first roll which the king had burnt. And God sent Jeremiah with a dreadful message to Jehoiakim. This was the message; "Thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim, king of Judah; I will punish him and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them and upon Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them." Then Jeremiah took a new roll, and gave it to Baruch; and Baruch wrote in it all the words of the first roll, as Jeremiah had told him. And many new words were added in this new roll. And they were dreadful words; words of anger and threatening against the wicked king, and his wicked people.

How fearful it is to despise God's word, and God's warnings! Sinners cannot resist

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the power of God. If he says he will punish his enemies, he will surely do it. They may try to fight against him; they may try to destroy his word and his people, but they cannot prevail. God is stronger than they; he must conquer at last; and then where will his enemies be? What will become of those who now despise him? The Bible tells us what dreadful words God himself has pronounced against them. "Because I called, and ye refused; and set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me, but they shall not find me; because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

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CHAPTER XXXII.

THE YOUNG CAPTIVES.

Soon after Jehoiakim had burnt the roll, God sent those evils upon him which had been threatened so long. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem, and took Jehoiakim prisoner, and bound him with chains, and was going to carry him to Babylon. But Jehoiakim died before he could be taken there; and his dead body was cast out unburied, beyond the gates of Jerusalem. None pitied, none cared for this wicked and rebellious king.

Nebuchadnezzar went into the house of God, and took away all the holy vessels he found there, and carried them to Babylon, and put them into his idol's temple. Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, reigned in Judah after his father, but only a very little time. Nebuchadnezzar came again to Jerusalem, and made Zedekiah, a relation of Jehoiachin, king; and carried Jehoiachin to Babylon, where he lived some years. A great many of the people of Judah were carried to Babylon also: all the

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princes, and nobles, and work-people; 1000 captives; only the poorest of the people were left in Jerusalem, with Zedekiah to reign over them. Jeremiah was there too; he was left to prophesy, and to warn the people of Judah.

Among the captives taken to Babylon, were some young nobles and princes who were very wise and clever. The king of Babylon was pleased with these children; and he said they should be taught all the learning of the Babylonians; and, after a few years, be taken into his palace to stand before him. The Bible tells us a great deal about four of these young princes. Their names were Daniel, Shadrach Meshach and Abed-nego. One of Nebuchadnezzar's servants had the care of them whose name was Melzar. Every day he brought them meat and wine from the king's table; for Nebuchadnezzar sent the young princes everything he thought they might like; and they had masters to teach them, and all that this world could give to make them happy. But Daniel and his young friends had learnt in their own country better wisdom than was taught at Babylon, they had learnt to seek happiness not in this world, but in God; and all their delight was

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in holy and heavenly things. When they came to Babylon, they knew that they should be often tempted to forget God, the God of Israel, and to love the things of the world, the foolish and wicked pleasures of Babylon. But these children determined, that they would not forsake their kind and merciful God in this strange and wicked land. They did not determine this in their own strength; but they asked God to give them his grace, and to help them to resist temptation, and to obey and serve him.

The food which was brought to the young princes, was sometimes food forbidden by the Jewish law; and sometimes it had been offered to the idols of Babylon. Daniel and his friends knew that it was wrong to eat this food. They were not now in their own country; but they wished still to obey the laws which God himself had given to them; and they determined not to displease him by eating what he had forbidden. So one day, when Melzar came to see them, Daniel spoke to him, and asked to have no more meats brought them from the king's table. Daniel spoke very respectfully and gently to Melzar; for he knew that it was his duty to honour those

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who were set over him. And Melzar loved Daniel, because he was so gentle, and humble, and obedient. Melzar said, "I am afraid if you do not eat the food, and drink the wine that the king sends you, you will grow thin, and pale, and sickly; and then Nebuchadnezzar will be displeased; because he wishes to see you strong and healthy, like the other children in Babylon."

But Daniel told Melzar, that God could make them strong and healthy with very little and very common food; and that the king's fine dishes could do them no good without God's blessing. And then Daniel said, "Try us for a few days. Give us only pulse to eat, and water to drink; and see if we grow thin, and pale, and sickly." So Melzar promised to try them for ten days. Then Daniel and his friends were very glad. They eat the pulse, and drank the water given them, with thankfulness and joy; because they felt that they had God's blessing, and were living in his love. And did they grow thin and sickly, as Melzar feared? No; after ten days he came again to see them and he found them fatter and more healthy

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than any of the children in Babylon. God had kept them in health and strength, because they trusted in him.

Here is another lesson to teach us self-denial. These young people were willing to deny themselves the nice meats and wines that Nebuchadnezzar sent them, because they feared to displease God. Are we self-denying like them? We ought to be so, because self-denial is a duty which the Bible teaches. We are not now forbidden to eat certain meats, as Daniel and the Jews of old were; but there are many things which God forbids us still, and which we must deny ourselves if we wish to serve and obey him. We live in a wicked world, as wicked as Babylon was; and often, very often, we are tempted to do what is wrong, and to disobey God's holy commands. Perhaps there are many children now, who, like Daniel and the three other young people, wish to love and serve God; but they have friends and companions who often tempt them to love and serve the world, and its pleasures, and vanities, and follies. What must such children do? They ought to do as the young captives

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in Babylon did. They should pray to God to help them to serve him: and to teach them, by his holy Spirit, how they must please him. And God will hear and direct his children now, as he did then. He is still willing to bless those who are ready to give up all for him. He says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters."

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FOUR GREAT EMPIRES.

When the time came for the young captives to be brought before the king, he found Daniel, Shadrách, Meshach, and Abed-nego, wiser and more learned than any of the others. They were even wiser than the wise men of Babylon who had been their teachers Why was this? Because God himself had taught them. They had his law and his spirit to instruct them in the best wisdom,—in the knowledge of God Thus David said, "I have more understanding than my teachers, because thy testimonies are my study. I am wiser than the aged, because I keep thy commandments."

God gave Daniel the spirit of prophecy, and enabled him to understand dreams and visions, and to interpret them. One night, king Nebuchadnezzar had a very wonderful dream, and "His spirit was troubled, and his sleep went from him." So when he arose in the morning, he called all the wise men of Baby-

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lon, and desired them to explain to him this dream which disturbed and perplexed him so much. Then they asked the king to tell them the dream, but Nebuchadnezzar answered, "The thing has gone from me; I have forgotten it; but if you do not tell me the dream, and the interpretation, I will cut you in pieces, and command all your houses to be thrown down and destroyed." It was cruel in Nebuchadnezzar to say this, and very unjust, too, to threaten to punish his wise men for not doing that which they could not possibly do by their own knowledge and wisdom. The dream came from God; and God alone could teach what the dream was, and what was its interpretation. But the wise men of Babylon were heathens; they never prayed to the true God, and they had not been taught by him to know those things which were foretold in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The wise men tried to pacify the king; they told him the thing he required of them was impossible; but he would not listen to what they said. "The king was angry, and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon." So this dreadful

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command was given, and Daniel and his friends were sought for to be slain too, for they were among the wise men of Babylon. But Daniel's wisdom was not like the wisdom of those magicians and astrologers, and sorcerers, who had first come before the king. No—Daniel had been taught of God, and when he heard why the wise men were to be destroyed, he felt sure that his God would not forget him, but would give him power and wisdom to tell the king the dream and the interpretation. So Daniel went to Nebuchadnezzar, and asked for a little time to be given, and then he promised that he would declare to the king all he wished to know. Then Daniel went to his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and told them what had been done, and asked them to pray with him to God, that this wonderful dream might be made known to them, and that they might not perish with the wise men of Babylon. And God heard their prayer, and revealed the secret to Daniel in a night vision. How thankful Daniel was! and he did not forget to praise and bless God who had so mercifully heard and answered his prayer.

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In the morning, Daniel went to Arioch, the captain of the guard, who had been commanded to destroy the wise men, and told him that he now knew the dream, and could interpret it; so Arioch brought him before the king. Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke to Daniel, and said, "Art thou able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation?" Daniel answered, "The secret which the king has demanded, cannot be shown by any of the wise men of Babylon. But there is a God in Heaven who reveals secrets, and he will make known to the king what shall be hereafter. And this secret has been revealed to me; not because of my wisdom, and my goodness; but for the sake of my friends and companions, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart." Then Daniel told the king what the dream was, and afterwards he explained to him its meaning. Daniel said, "Thou, O king, sawest a great image. Its head was gold; its breast and arms silver; its thighs brass; its legs iron; its feet part of iron, and part of clay. Thou sawest till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the

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image, upon its feet of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces; and afterwards, this stone became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

This was the dream, and then Daniel showed the king the interpretation of it. The vision was sent by God, who knows the future as well as the past, and it was meant to teach Daniel, and Nebuchadnezzar, and all the people who heard it, many great events which would come to pass when they were dead and in their graves. The different parts of the image signified four great empires, which should, one after another, have great power and dominion in the world. The head of gold was the first of those great empires, the Babylonian, of which Nebuchadnezzar was then the rich and mighty king. But Nebuchadnezzar would soon die; his kingdom too would pass away, and be taken possession of by another people, and another king. We shall soon read how this happened;—how Cyrus came, and the Medes and Persians, and took Babylon; and then that great monarchy was gone for ever. The breast and arms of silver in the image, signified the second great

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empire;—that of the Medes and Persians, the most powerful in the world, after the Babylonian monarchy was destroyed. We shall read about Cyrus, the famous king of Persia, and all the good things he did for God's people, the Jews. But Cyrus died, and many kings, who reigned after him in Persia, died; and, at last, the Persian monarchy was overcome and destroyed by a new empire,—the Macedonian. The thighs of brass in the image, represented this third great monarchy. It began with Alexander the Great, of whom we hear so much in history, and who was prophesied of by Daniel, some time after this dream was sent to Nebuchadnezzar. Alexander subdued Persia, and made many great conqests, and his kingdom was, for a time, very powerful. But when he died, his dominions were divided into four parts, as Daniel had prophesied they would be, and they became weak and feeble, and were all conquered at last by another and stronger power. This was the Roman Empire, signified in the dream by the legs of iron. It was the greatest and most powerful of all. When Jesus Christ was born, the Romans possessed almost all the known

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world, and they were a mighty people for very many years. But the Roman monarchy, like all the others, passed away in time. It became divided into ten kingdoms, represented by the ten tbes in the feet of the image, and some of these kingdoms were strong, and others weak, as the ten toes in the image were partly iron, and partly clay. But what is meant by the stone which smote the image, and afterwards became a great mountain, and filled all the earth? That stone signifies a better and more powerful kingdom than any of the four of which we have been reading. It means the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. That kingdom began long ago; it was founded by God himself, not by man; just as the stone was cut out "without hands," not by human power. That little stone is growing larger and larger, as Christ's gospel is more known and extended; though it is not yet the great mountain filling all the earth. But it one day will be. All the other kingdoms have passed, or will pass away; all have rebelled against God, and therefore he will not suffer them to remain; they will fall and pass away before that great kingdom which shall last for ever,

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as the stone smote the image, and broke it to pieces.

When Daniel had ended, king Nebuchadnezzar fell down before him, and did him honour, and made him "a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the province of Babylon."

Daniel did not forget his friends in his prosperity. He asked Nebuchadnezzar to be kind to them also; and Nebuchadnezzar did as Daniel wished, and made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, rulers in the land. But all these honours did not turn their hearts away from God. They prayed God, who had helped them to resist temptation at first, to give them his grace still, that they might not forget him, and fall into the sins of the people around them.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FIERY FURNACE.

Soon after all this, Nebuchadnezzar, the idolatrous king of Babylon, made a great image of gold. It was set up in a plain in Babylon; and the people were commanded to fall down, and worship it. All the princes, and captains, and judges, and nobles, came at Nebuchadnezzar's command; and then a herald cried aloud to the people, "To you it is commanded, that at the time when ye hear the sound of the horns, and the harps, and the pipes, and the trumpets, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. And whoso will not fall down and worship, he shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, heard the command given; and they heard, too, the dreadful punishment which was threatened to those who disobeyed; but these good men felt that they could not obey, because he whom they served had commanded

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them to worship no strange gods. He had said, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me;" and "Thou shalt not make any graven images; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, asked God to give them strength to obey him. Perhaps they felt frightened at first, when they thought about the dreadful furnace; but God heard their prayer, and gave them faith to trust in him, and to be willing even to die in his service.

At last the time came. The music sounded, and then all the people fell down, and worshipped the golden image. What a sad sight it was! The great image set up in the middle of the plain, and the king himself, and all his people, many, many thousands, falling down to worship it! Do we think this sad? Let us remember, that there are many thousands of poor heathen in the world now, who worship images. Pray God to pity these poor idolaters; and to send his word to them, to teach them about the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

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Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had enemies in Babylon, who watched to see if they would worship the golden image, or not; and when these enemies found that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, did not attend to the king's command, they ran directly, and told Nebuchadnezzar. They said, "Thou, O king, hast made a law, that every man shall fall down and worship the golden image, when the music begins to sound; but the Jews whom thou hast made rulers in Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, they will not obey thy command, nor worship thy gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar was very angry, and commanded the three Jews to be brought before him.

When they came, the king spoke to them, and said, "Is it true that you do not worship my gods, and the image I have set up? Now then, make yourselves ready; and when you hear the music sound, fall down and worship my image; and I will forgive you, and it shall be well with you; but if not you shall be cast directly into the burning fiery furnace; and who can deliver you then?" But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered, "O Nebuchad-

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nezzar, our God, whom we worship, is also able to deliver us from the burning furnace; and we know that he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image. We are willing to be thrown into the fiery furnace; but we cannot, we will not disobey our God." It was God who gave these men power to confess him so boldly before their enemies. He had taken away their fear; and now they stood quietly and peacefully before the king, waiting to hear their sentence, and ready to be cast into the fire. Nebuchadnezzar was very angry indeed. He commanded his servants to make the furnace seven times hotter than it was before; and then some strong men took Shadrach Meshach, and Abed-nego, and bound them, and cast them alive into the burning fiery furnace. The furnace was so very hot, that the flame of the fire burnt to death the men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

But what happened to these three good men? Did the God whom they served remember them in their trouble? Did he show Nebuchadnezzar that he was able to deliver his servants who trusted in him? Yes; God was pleased to pre-

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serve his own people, and to teach his enemies what a powerful God he is. The Lord Jesus Christ himself came to them in the fire. He saw their trouble, and heard their cry, and came to save them. He commanded the flames not to burn them; and loosed their bonds, and walked with them in the fire; and God's promise was fulfilled to them,—"When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace; and then he arose in haste, and called his governors, and said to them, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They said "True, O king." Nebuchadnezzar answered "I now see four men in the furnace; and they are not bound; they are walking loose in the fire; they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Then Nebuchadnezzar went again to the mouth of the furnace, and cried, "O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come out, and come hither." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came out of the fire. Their clothes were not burnt; their hair was

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not singed; there was was no smell of fire upon them. The king, and the princes, and nobles, and captains, all saw, and wondered; and Nebuchadnezzar now believed, that the God of Judah was a powerful God indeed. He cried aloud to all the people, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him! And now I make a law, that any person who shall dare to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces; because there is no other god who can deliver as he delivers." Then Nebuchadnezzar gave great riches and honours to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and sent them away, and never again commanded them to worship the idol gods of Babylon.

What a wonderful story! What was it that made these three good men so bold, and fearless, and willing to suffer? It was their love to God, their faith in him. They loved God so much, that they chose rather to be cast into the furnace, than to do any thing to displease him. They had so much faith in God, that they could trust all to him; they knew he could deliver them if he pleased; and if not, they were ready

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and willing to die. God has given the same faith and love to many other holy men, who have suffered for him at different times, and in different parts of the world.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JEREMIAH IMPRISONED.

ZEDEKIAH was still reigning in Jerusalem, and Jeremiah was still prophesying to the people who were left there. The Babylonians had gone away for a little time; but God told Jeremiah, that these enemies would soon come back again, and fight against Jerusalem, and take it, and burn it with fire. Jeremiah had many enemies in Jerusalem. He was a kind friend to them, always warning them faithfully, and trying to bring them to repentance. But the people of Judah disliked to be told of their faults; they hated Jeremiah, and falsely accused him, and brought him before the princes to be judged. The princes believed what the enemies of Jeremiah told them, and were very angry with the

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good prophet, and beat him, and shut him up in prison. There he stayed many days; but at last king Zedekiah sent for him secretly, and took him out, because he wished to know from Jeremiah, what God had said about Jerusalem and the Babylonians. Zedekiah asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah answered "Yes; there is a word from the Lord, and it is this: thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." When Jeremiah had told his message, he asked Zedekiah to take him out of the prison, that he might not die. Zedekiah attended to Jeremiah, and told him he should not go back to the prison where he was before. But Zedekiah commanded his servants to put the prophet in the court of the prison, by the king's house; and every day a piece of bread was sent to him there from the bakers' street.

The people were still very angry with Jeremiah, because of the message he gave them from God. What was the message? "Thus saith the Lord, this city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon. Those that stay in the city shall die by the sword and by famine; but those that go out to the

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king of Babylon's army shall live." This was God's word, and all would surely come true; but it displeased the unbelieving princes very much, and they again accused Jeremiah to the king. They told Zedekiah that Jeremiah did no good; and that he frightened the people so much, that they would not be able to fight when the Babylonians came; and then the princes asked Zedekiah to put the good prophet to death. Zedekiah was a weak man, and did not like to refuse the princes, for he thought they were stronger than he; so he said, "Yes; you may do as you please with Jeremiah."

Then the princes went to the place where Jeremiah was and took him away, and cast him into a dungeon. This dungeon was a dreadful place. It was a dark pit, full of mud and dirt, and without light or air: Jeremiah was let down into it by ropes, and then the cruel princes left him, and went away. Jeremiah stayed a long time in the dungeon; he sank down into the mire, and was almost starved, for his enemies brought him no bread to eat. But in all his trouble, it was a comfort to Jeremiah to think why he was thrown into that dreadful place. It was because he had spoken the truth which God

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commanded him to speak. He was suffering for God, and he knew that God would not forsake him. God could hear Jeremiah's prayers in the dungeon, as he had heard the prayers of the three good men in the furnace; and send deliverance to him, as he had done to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. And at last, Jeremiah was delivered from the miry dungeon. Ebed-melech, one of the king's servants told Zedekiah where poor Jeremiah was, and how much he was suffering; and the king pitied him when he heard the sad story, and commanded the servant to go with thirty men, and take Jeremiah out of the prison. So these men went into a room in the king's house, where old garments and rags were kept, and took away some of the rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon where Jeremiah was. Why? Because these kind men were going to draw him out of the pit, and they thought that the cords under his arms might hurt him; so they said to him, "Put these rags under thy arms, under the cords, and then we will draw thee out." Jeremiah did as they told him, and the men pulled him up out of the dungeon, and set him upon dry ground.

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And now Zedekiah sent again for Jeremiah, and asked him about God's message to the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah first asked Zedekiah not to put him to death, and not to give him into his enemies' hands. Zedekiah promised to take care of him, and then Jeremiah said, "This is God's message; if thou wilt submit to go with the king of Babylon's princes, thou shalt live; but if not, the city will be burnt, and thou shalt not escape. Obey the voice of God, and it shall be well with thee." Then Zedekiah told Jeremiah to keep all this secret from the princes, and sent him away; and Jeremiah stayed safely in the court of the prison, by the king's house.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

JUDGMENT UPON JUDAH.

When Zedekiah had reigned about nine years in Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar came again with his army, and besieged the city. Many months Jerusalem was suffering from famine and sickness, for there was no bread for the people to eat. At last, Jerusalem was taken. The walls were broken down, and Nebuchadnezzar, and his princes, and his soldiers, came in, and took possession of the city. What became of Zedekiah? He tried to escape, and many of his servants with him; but the Babylonians pursued them, and overtook Zedekiah and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was very cruel to his poor fallen enemy. He took Zedekiah's two sons, and slew them before their father's eyes; and then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with chains, and carried him to Babylon. All the nobles in Judah were slain; and the king's house was thrown down by the Babylonian army, and burnt with fire; and the

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houses of all the people in Jerusalem were destroyed too. And the holy temple of God, which Solomon built, where the people of Judah had so often met to pray, and praise the Lord, that holy temple was burnt down to the ground, and the vessels in it were destroyed, or carried away to Babylon. Almost all the people of Judah were taken captive; only some of the very poorest were left behind.

But where was Jeremiah? Was he taken prisoner, and carried to Babylon? No; God who had taken care of Jeremiah so long, still preserved him, and inclined the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to show him kindness. When the city was taken, Nebuchadnezzar commanded his captain to "look well to Jeremiah, and do him no harm." So the captain sent, and took Jeremiah out of the prison court, where Zedekiah had put him, and delivered him to Gedaliah. Who was Gedaliah? He was the governor whom Nebuchadnezzar had set over the poor Jews who still stayed in Jerusalem. He lived at Mizpeh; and Jeremiah went to him there, and lived with him. God can preserve his people in the greatest dangers, and he had promised to

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keep Jeremiah safely in all the troubles which came upon Judah.

And there was another good man whom God promised to protect. This was Ebed-melech, the kind servant who asked Zedekiah to take Jeremiah out of the dungeon.

Ebed-melech loved Jeremiah, and showed him kindness, out of love to that God in whom both Jeremiah and Ebed-melech put their trust. God saw Ebed-melech's faith, and love; and now, when the city was destroyed he sent a message of comfort by Jeremiah to this faithful servant. What was the message? "Thus saith the Lord; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." Let us put our trust in the Lord too, and then, whatever troubles or sorrows we may have, the God of Jeremiah and of Ebed-melech will be with us to comfort and bless us.

Gedaliah was a wise governor. He advised his people to stay quietly in Mizpeh, and submit to the king of Babylon, who was now their master, and whom it was their duty to

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obey; and many of the Jews attended to Gedaliah's advice, and dwelt peacefully and safely at Mizpeh, where they had fields, and vineyards, and fruits, and oil, and wine. But after a little time, Gedaliah was murdered by his cruel enemy Ishmael; and some of the Jews at Mizpeh were killed too, and the rest taken prisoners. But many of these prisoners were afterwards delivered by a man named Johanan, who went to fight against Ishmael. Ishmael escaped to the Ammonites; and then Johanan, and the Jews he had saved, went to Bethlehem. Jeremiah was still with them, and they all asked him to pray for them, and to teach them what they must do. Jeremiah was willing to pray for them, and to give them good advice. He talked to them a long time, and told them the truth. He said, "If you will stay quietly in this land, then God will protect, and save, and deliver you from the king of Babylon. But if you will not stay here, but go away into Egypt, or any other country, then God will be very angry, and destroy you by the sword, and by famine, and by plague. Now then, be obedient to the Lord, and submit to his command."

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The people had been very ready to ask Jeremiah's advice, but they were very unwilling to attend to it. They all cried out, "Thou speakest falsely. God has not sent thee to tell us this. It is not God's command, and we do not choose to obey thee." Then they all made themselves ready, and went to Egypt. But God was very angry with these rebellious people, and his curse followed them to Egypt, and not his blessing. They were going to an idolatrous country, where God had commanded them not to go; and their disobedience only brought worse punishment upon them. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in Egypt, (for the good prophet was obliged to go with the people there,) and this was the message sent to them. "Thus saith the Lord; you have seen all the evil which I have sent upon Judah, because of the people's sins and idolatries; but you have not repented, nor humbled yourselves, nor submitted to my will. You have rebelled again and again; and now you have come to Egypt, when I commanded you not to go there. Therefore thus saith the Lord; because you have done this, I will bring evil upon you, and cut you

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off. You shall be destroyed by the sword, and by famine, and by pestilence. I will punish you in Egypt, as I punished your brethren in Jerusalem; none shall escape; and when at last you wish to return to Judah, you shall not be able."

What a dreadful message! Were not the people frightened now? No; they were so hardened in sin and rebellion that they cared for nothing God said to them, and they boldly answered Jeremiah, "We will not hearken to the word thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord. We will do as we please. We will worship idols, and burn incense to them, as we have done, and as our fathers used to do in Judah. We were happier then than we are now. We had plenty of food, and were well, and saw no evil. But when we left off worshipping idols, trouble came; so we will begin again, and worship what we choose, for we care nothing for the words thou hast spoken." Jeremiah felt sad indeed when he heard this wicked speech. He had warned the people, and advised them; but all was of no use; so now he said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord; I will watch over you for evil, and not for

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good; all the men of Judah in the land of Egypt shall be destroyed, and you shall know whose word shall stand, yours or mine."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SEVENTY YEARS' CAPTIVITY.

When we read this sad story about the rebellion of the people of Judah, what should we learn from it? Learn the very great wickedness of the heart. The wickedness of whose heart? Of the Jews', or the Israelites? Not theirs alone; they were wicked indeed, but their hearts were not worse than ours. The heart of every man, and woman, and child, not renewed by the Holy Spirit, is as full of rebellion, and self-will, and ingratitude, as the hearts of the people of Judah were. Has your rebellious heart been made new? If not, the frown of God is upon you; and if you die as you are now, you must be sent away from him for ever. What can you do? It is not yet too late to have

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your sinful heart made new and clean. The Holy Spirit is willing to cleanse you. Go to God, and pray as David did, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

But what became of the good prophet Jeremiah? The Bible does not tell us how or where he died; but we read in history, that the wicked rebellious Jews in Egypt grew so tired of his faithful warnings, that at last they put him to death. And then Jeremiah could warn them no more; he could not again speak to them of God's anger, nor of God's mercy; nor ask them to repent, and turn from their evil ways. The Jews in Egypt lost then their best earthly friend; and they lost him by their own folly, and rebellion, and sin. But the day of his death was a happy, glorious day to Jeremiah. It was the end of all his sorrows and sufferings, and the beginning of his everlasting joy in heaven. He then received what God promises to all who shall truly serve him to the end, when he says,—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

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The wicked Jews could silence the holy prophet by putting him to death, but they could not prevent God from fulfilling his threatenings. Soon after, the powerful king Nebuchadnezzar who had conquered Judah, came to Egypt, and subdued that country too. And then God's words to Jeremiah were fulfilled. The wicked Jews were almost all slain with the sword; very few of them escaped to tell the sad story of their sin and their punishment. See what a fearful thing it is to make God angry!

All this time, the poor prisoners, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Judah, were in sorrow and suffering at Babylon. There they had no temple, no sacrifices, no priests. Those around them were worshippers of idols; and when the poor captives remembered how far away their own beloved home was, where they had once prayed, and sung praises to the true God in peace and joy, they wept for sorrow. And then they thought why they had been sent to this strange land; and they remembered that it was because of their sins and idolatry that God punished them. Many of them felt very much humbled, and repented,

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and turned to God, and asked him to forgive and pity them. And did God hear them? Yes; he had not forgotten his people; he had not forsaken them for ever. Before they went to Babylon, God promised that their captivity there should last only seventy years, and that, at the end of those seventy years, he would bring them back to their own land again. This promise comforted the poor captives in their trouble; but still they could not forget their sorrows; and many of them, who were old, could not hope to live to the end of the seventy years, and to go to their home again. They found it hard to sing their joyful psalms of praise, while they were away from their happy country. They could not sing for weeping; but they wrote many beautiful psalms, and tried to praise God as well as they could in this strange land.

The people of God now are living in a strange land, far distant from their own home, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Like the poor captives in Babylon, they have much sorrow, and pain, and trouble. But this will not last forever. God will soon bring them home to that happy land where all tears are wiped away, and where

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there is no more sorrow. And he is always with them now; he can see all their trouble; and he can comfort them by his Spirit, and by the promises he has given them in his word.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR was a very powerful king; and he was proud of his power, and his conquests, and his possessions. He knew something about the true God, and when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar confessed that their God was indeed more powerful than any of the idols of the heathen. But Nebuchadnezzar had not yet truly repented and turned to God; his heart had not been made new by the Holy Spirit; it was still full of pride, and ambition, and love of worldly things. But God, in mercy, determined to subdue the pride of this great king; and to teach him his own sinfulness and folly, and to make him

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give praise to him alone. God was pleased to teach Nebuchadnezzar all this in a very wonderful way. We are going now to read how it was.

One night, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a very remarkable dream. This dream was not like the common dreams we often have. It was sent by God to teach and warn Nebuchadnezzar. God was often pleased, in past ages, to speak to people in dreams. We have read before of the dreams of Joseph, and of the butler and baker in Egypt, and of king Pharaoh, and of the soldier in the camp of Midian, which comforted Gideon so much. All these dreams came from God; but we do not hear of such dreams now. God might, if he chose, still speak to us in this way; but he is pleased rather to speak to us in his word. We have much more knowledge of God, from his Bible, than the people we read about in the Old Testament had. Let us attend to what we read, and thank God who has given us his holy word to teach and guide us.

When Nebuchadnezzar awoke, he thought very much about his dream. He knew that there was something wonderful in it, but he

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could not understand what it meant; so he called all the wise men of Babylon, and asked them to explain it. But these wise men had no knowledge in the things of God, because they were not taught by his Spirit, and therefore they could not help Nebuchadnezzar to understand his dream. At last, the king remembered that Daniel, the Jewish captive, was able to interpret dreams; so he sent for him. Then Daniel came before the king, and heard the wonderful dream.

Nebuchadnezzar said to him, "O Daniel, I know that the spirit of the holy God is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee; and I have sent for thee, to tell me the interpretation of my dream."

God had taught Daniel what the dream meant; the meaning was very sad, and Daniel felt sorry that he must tell it to the king. But, like faithful Jeremiah, Daniel was not afraid of speaking God's truth, so he said at once, "The tree which thou sawest in thy dream, which grew, and was so strong, and which reached above the clouds, whose leaves were so fair, and the fruit of which was so plentiful; under which the beasts lay, and upon

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whose branches the birds made their nests;—this great tree, O king, is thyself. Thou art great and strong; thy greatness reaches to Heaven, and thy power to the end of the world. Thou didst see, O king, a holy one come from Heaven, and he gave commandment about the great tree, saying, Cut it down; but leave the root bound with iron and brass in the grass of the field, and let it be with the beasts, and wet with the dew of Heaven, till seven times have passed over it. The interpretation of this, O king, is, that thou shalt lose thy power and thy greatness, and be taken from thy throne, and driven among the beasts. Thou shalt eat grass like the oxen, and be wet with the dew of Heaven, till seven years have passed away; till thou shalt confess that God is king, and that he alone ruleth over all. And now, O king, hearken to my advice; attend to the warning which God in mercy sends thee. Forsake thy sins and iniquities, and turn to the Lord. Humble thyself before him; do what is righteous in his sight, and show mercy to the poor; and then, it may be, God will spare thee, and not send these fearful judgments."

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The proud king would not attend to the advice he had received, nor humble himself before God. But God waited before he punished. A year passed away, and Nebuchadnezzar still enjoyed his riches and his power; he had all this time to repent, but he would not. At last, the dreadful judgment came. One day, at the end of the year, Nebuchadnezzar was walking in his palace at Babylon. He was admiring his possessions, and thinking what a great king he was. In his pride he said, "This is great Babylon which I have built by my power, and for my honour." But while the proud king was speaking, a voice fell from Heaven, saying, "O Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom is gone from thee, and thou shalt be driven among the beasts, till thou confess that God is king, and that he alone rules over all." That very hour, the dreadful judgment came upon Nebuchadnezzar. God took away his reason, and he became a poor madman. He could not rule his kingdom, nor enjoy his riches, nor live comfortably in his palace now. He would not stay there. He rushed out into the fields, and lived with the oxen, and eat grass like them.

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He had no home, no friends; he was "Driven from men," as God had told him. Seven years Nebuchadnezzar was in this dreadful state; his hair grew like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

But God was not going to destroy Nebuchadnezzar. All was done in mercy. Like the great tree in the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was cut down, humbled to the dust; but the root was in the ground still, bound round with iron and brass: his life was preserved; God watched over him, and kept him all these seven years. And at the end of those seven years, God looked in mercy upon the poor unhappy king.

Nebuchadnezzar had been humbled; his proud heart was now willing to submit to God, and he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and cried for pardon. God was willing to forgive. He gave Nebuchadnezzar his reason and understanding again, and taught him to praise, and bless, and honour him who is "King of kings and Lord of lords." And then Nebuchadnezzar felt that God alone is king over all the earth; and that he has power to do all things, and to rule

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all men as he pleases. God gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom again; and we may hope that he ruled over it in the fear of God, and in humble submission to his will; and that, when the time came for Nebuchadnezzar to die, and leave his earthly kingdom, he received an everlasting kingdom in Heaven, and that "Crown of glory which fadeth not away."

Learn from this story what a dreadful sin pride is; how angry it makes God. None of us have anything to be proud of. All we have God gave us, and God can take away in a moment. But we are all proud; foolish and wicked as it is to be so. Some people are proud of their riches; some of their power; some of their wisdom and knowledge; some of their beauty. Even children are often very proud. Perhaps they are proud of their dress, or of their quickness in learning. All this pride is very displeasing to God. What does the Bible say about it? "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Yes; God loves humility, and all his people love it too. The most holy people are always the most humble. There is no pride in Heaven. The blessed

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angels and spirits there are not proud. Jesus Christ himself, the King of glory, when he was on earth, was not proud. He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Only foolish sinners on earth, and rebellious, wicked spirits in Hell, are proud. Do you wish to be humble, like the meek and lowly Jesus? Then you must pray God to make you so, because humility is his gift; we cannot make ourselves humble. Ask him to take away your pride, and to make you one of his humble, gentle, and submissive children.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST.

We are going now to read about another king of Babylon, who reigned some time after Nebuchadnezzar's death: his name was Belshazzar. He was proud and rebellious, as Nebuchadnezzar once was; but he did not, like Nebuchadnezzar, repent and turn to God before his death. God had long been very angry with the wicked kings and people of Babylon. He was angry with them because of their idolatry, and pride, and cruelty to his people Judah. God let Judah go into captivity, to punish them for their sins, but he was very angry with their enemies who afflicted them; and he said he would destroy those enemies, and deliver his own people, when the right time should come. God had said this, by his prophet, many years before. He had taught Isaiah what armies should come against Babylon, and the name of the prince who should command them. These armies now came from Media and Persia; and they

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were commanded by Cyrus, the king of Persia's son. They came to Babylon, and began to besiege it; but Belshazzar thought himself very safe in his strong city, and did not fear his enemies.

One night, there was a great feast in Babylon. Belshazzar was there, and his princes, and nobles. They all eat, and drank, and made merry; and brought out the holy vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from God's temple in Jerusalem, and poured wine into them, and praised their idol gods of gold, and silver, and iron, and brass, and wood, and stone. But all the time, the eye of God was upon this wicked company; he heard them blaspheming his holy name, and soon he was going to punish them. While they were all feasting, Belshazzar looked up to the wall of the room where they were sitting, and he saw the fingers of a man's hand writing upon the wall. He could not tell who was writing; he saw only the fingers, and the words written; and he could not understand the words. Then Belshazzar was very much frightened; and he called all his wise men, and asked them to read and explain the writing

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upon the wall, and promised to give great honours and riches to any one who could interpret it. But the wise men could not read nor understand the writing. Like Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it came from God; and only one taught by God's Spirit, had wisdom to interpret it.

At last, Belshazzar's mother, queen Nitocris, came into the room, and told the king about Daniel; for she remembered that he had explained Nebuchadnezzar's dream, when the wise men of Babylon could not. When Belshazzar heard this, he sent for Daniel directly. So Daniel was brought in, and the king spoke to him, and said, "I have heard that thou hast wisdom to understand hard things, and to give interpretations. If now thou canst read and interpret this writing, which the wise men of Babylon cannot understand, I will clothe thee in scarlet, and give thee a chain of gold, and make thee ruler in my kingdom."

Then holy Daniel stood up boldly, in the middle of the wicked company, and said, "I want not thy gifts; I care not for rewards; but I will read the writing unto the king, and make known the interpretation. O king Belshazzar,

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the great God gave thy father Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom, and much honour and power. But when Nebuchadnezzar grew proud of his glory, then God took him down from his throne, and he was driven among the beasts, till he knew that God alone rules over the kingdoms of the world. O Belshazzar, thou knowest all this, but thou hast not humbled thyself before God. Thou hast rebelled against him, and brought out the vessels of his temple, and drank wine in them; and praised the gods of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, and wood, and stone, which cannot see, nor hear, nor know; but the great God who made all things, him thou hast not praised nor glorified. And, therefore, he has sent the hand to write upon the wall; and now hear the writing, and the interpretation."

Then Daniel read the words written on the wall. They were very few words; but they were words full of wonderful and dreadful meaning. What were they? "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Peres, Upharsin." Belshazzar and his company looked in wonder to Daniel, to tell them the meaning of these words, for they

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could not understand what was read. Then Daniel said, "This is the interpretation: God has numbered thy kingdom, and finished it—thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting—thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

This was the dreadful interpretation. Was Belshazzar frightened? Did he put an end to the feast, and send away his company, and fall down humbly before God, and cry for mercy? We do not read that he did. He clothed Daniel in scarlet, and gave him a chain of gold, and commanded him to be proclaimed ruler in the kingdom. Perhaps they thought all these dreadful things which Daniel had spoken, would not come upon them yet;—perhaps they might not come for a long time; so they tried to forget them, and to enjoy themselves. Was this right? No; when God sends a message, it ought to be attended to directly; perhaps he may never speak again: he never spoke again to king Belshazzar. There are many people now like that wicked king and his company; people who are rebellious, and disobedient, and forgetful of God. God sends a message to

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these people. They cannot read it upon the walls of their houses, but they may read it in God's word. The Bible says to them, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people who forget God." How dreadful it will be for them, if they try to forget this warning, as Belshazzar tried to forget the hand-writing on the wall! How fearful it will be for such people to be cut off in their sins, as he was, and to be "found wanting" in the day of judgment! Without pardon, without hope, without mercy then!

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CHAPTER XL.

CYRUS.

Cyrus and his army were now within the city, and Belshazzar knew knothing of it. How had they come in? Babylon was a very strong city. The walls were high, and the gates were brass, and the river Euphrates flowed through it. All this made the people feel very safe. They thought that the Medes and Persians could not get in; and they were not afraid of a long siege, because there was plenty of food inside of the city. But God had promised to give Babylon to Cyrus, and when God promises to do a thing, he can make all easy. He taught Cyrus to find a way into the city, without breaking down the walls and gates.

How was this? There was a great lake outside the walls; and canals and ditches were made to carry off the waters of the Euphrates when it was too full. Cyrus commanded his soldiers to open these ditches, and let the water of the river flow into them. They did

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this while Belshazzar and his company were feasting in the palace. Cyrus thought that the best time, because all the people in the city were then so merry, and so busy, that they had no time to think about their enemies. The water of the river was turned into the lake, and soon the bed of the Euphrates became almost dry. Then Cyrus commanded his soldiers to march through the channel of the river, into the city. They could do this very easily, because the water was now so low that it could not drown nor hurt them. So Cyrus and his soldiers walked through the bed of the river, and were soon in the middle of Babylon. There were steps, and great gates of brass, on each side the river, leading into the streets. These gates ought to have been shut; but this night, the people had forgotten to shut the gates; so Cyrus and his men went through, and that night the city was taken and Belshazzar slain. The rest of the people in Babylon, when they saw that the Medes and Persians had killed their king, submitted to Cyrus, and he took possession of the city. This was the end of Belshazzar and of his kingdom. Babylon now belonged to Cyaxares, the king of

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Media, and uncle of Cyrus; and when Cyrus had settled every thing in Babylon, he went to Media, and told his uncle the good news of his conquest, and brought him back to live in his new city. Cyaxares is called, in the Bible, Darius the Mede.

When we read this wonderful story of the taking of Babylon, we must remember that it was God who brought Cyrus to Babylon; who taught him the best way, and the right time to take the city; and who gave him success in all he did. It was God who said "to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers;" and who said of Cyrus, "He shall perform all my pleasure." God had taught his prophets to predict these things about Babylon, many, many years before Cyrus was born.

But why did God destroy the kingdom of Babylon? Because of the wickedness of the people. Sin has caused the destruction of many countries and cities. Let us pray God to bless our country, that it may not sin and perish like wicked Babylon. There is only one thing that can make a country truly safe and happy. Not riches, nor power; but holiness; because God's blessing will be upon a righteous nation, and

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then no enemy will have power to hurt it. "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

CHAPTER XLI.

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN.

DANIEL still lived in Babylon in great favour and honour with king Darius, who made him ruler over the kingdom and over the princes and nobles. But Daniel had enemies in Babylon. The princes hated him, and did not like him to have so much honour; and they were always watching to find some fault in him, that they might accuse him to the king. But Daniel was so good and holy a man, and so honest and just in all he did, that his enemies could find nothing wrong in him to tell Darius. He knew how to get help and strength; he sought them from God every day he lived, and God heard his prayers, and gave Daniel all those holy gifts which he needed. Do you want to be good and holy like Daniel? Then pray as

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he did, and you will be enabled to live as he did.

But Daniel's cruel enemies were still determined to accuse him to the king; and there was one thing of which they knew they could accuse him. What was it? His praying to God. They saw him often kneel down, and pray to his own God, the God of Israel, who had made all things; not to the idol gods whom his enemies feared and worshipped. So, one day, these princes went to king Darius, and asked him to make a new law. What was it? That no one in the kingdom should make a prayer or request to any god or man, for thirty days, but to the king only; and that whoever disobeyed this command, should be taken, and thrown into a den of lions. Darius did not know why the princes asked for this; and, without thinking about Daniel, he made the law, and sent them away very much pleased. Why were they pleased? Because now they knew that they should soon be able to accuse Daniel; for they were sure he would disobey the command, and pray every day to his God as he had done before.

What a cruel law this was! How sad to

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live in a country were the people were forbidden to pray to God! We ought to be very thankful that it is not so in our country. Here people may pray as often as they wish, and they have none to make them afraid; but it is sad to think there are some who do not pray—Reader do you pray? We are allowed, and encouraged too, to pray. Every little child, as soon as it can understand, may be taught to kneel down, and pray to the kind Saviour who says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Are you thankful for this? And do you pray with all your heart as Daniel did? When you ask God to forgive you your sins, and to give you a new heart, and to help you to love, and serve, and obey him, do you really wish very much to have what you ask? If not, God will not attend to your prayers, nor answer them. But if you do, then he will hear, and bless you, and give you all you really need.

But what could Daniel do when he heard the king's command? Did he give up praying for the thirty days, and make his requests to the king alone? No; Daniel had many things to ask for every hour; things which Darius could not give him. He wanted par-

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don, and grace, and strength, and comfort; Daniel could not wait thirty days without these. He must disobey the law. He always tried to obey Darius, when he could do so without displeasing God; but now he could not; for God's command is to "Pray always;" and Daniel knew that he must obey God more than man. Then did he try to hide from his enemies, and pray in some secret place where they could not see him? No: he opened his window towards Jerusalem, his own beloved home where the holy temple had stood, and knelt down, and prayed, and gave thanks to God, three times a day, as he had done before. Why did Daniel do this? Not to make a boast of his goodness, but to show his enemies that he was not afraid nor ashamed of praying to God. Never be afraid of doing right. Perhaps sometimes you do not like to read the Bible, and to pray to God, for fear your companions should laugh at you, or despise you. Is it right to be afraid or ashamed of doing what God commands you? No; do as Daniel did: think of your duty to God, and try to obey him. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of

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me, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed whem he cometh in the glory of his Father."

Was Daniel seen praying? Yes; his enemies were watching and soon found him on his knees, asking help from God; and they ran directly, full of joy, to tell the king. They said, "O king, didst thou not command, that no one should make a petition to any god or man for thirty days, but to thee alone? Didst thou not say, that whoever disobeyed this law, should be cast into a den of lions?" Darius answered, "Yes, I did." Then the men said, "There is one man who does not care for thy command, O king. He kneels down, and makes his petition to his God, three times a day. This man is Daniel, one of the Jewish captives." Then Darius was sorry, for he loved and honoured Daniel, and he tried very hard to save him. But the cruel enemies said, "The law cannot be changed; Daniel has disobeyed it, and he must suffer the punishment."

Then Darius commanded Daniel to be brought, and cast into the lions' den; but as the men were hurrying him away, the king

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said, "O Daniel, the God whom thou servest, he will deliver thee." Darius did not know much about Daniel's God; but he thought, that if God was as good and powerful as Daniel said, he would surely save his faithful servant in this time of trouble. So Daniel was thrown into the den; and a stone was put upon the mouth of the den, and the king himself sealed the stone, and then went home to his palace. All that night, Darius fasted and mourned for Daniel. He would have no music, nor singing, nor rejoicing, in his palace; he could enjoy nothing; and when he lay down on his bed, he could not sleep; he was so anxious, so unhappy about Daniel. And very early in the morning, Darius arose, and went to the den: for he could wait no longer; he must know whether Daniel was living, or whether he had been torn in pieces by the furious lions.

When the king came to the den, he cried out, "O Daniel, is thy God, whom thou servest, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Darius waited very anxiously for the answer; but how glad he was when he heard Daniel's voice again, and found that he was still alive

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Daniel in the Lion's den.—p. 181.

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and well in the lions' den! And what did Daniel say? He said, "O king, my God has sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me. Then Darius was very glad, and he commanded that Daniel should be taken out of the den. "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

And now, the king determined to punish Daniel's wicked accusers; so he commanded them to be brought, and cast into the den. They had no God to preserve them; no holy angel was sent to shut the lions' mouths for them; no; the savage beasts sprang upon them in a moment, and broke all their bones to pieces, before they came to the bottom of the den. All the people saw, and wondered; and confessed that Daniel's God was indeed a powerful God, able to deliver his servants, and to punish his enemies. And then, Darius wrote to all the people in his kingdom, and told them the wonderful story of Daniel's deliverance, and commanded them to fear and tremble, before the great and powerful God of Daniel.

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Let this powerful God be your friend, as he was Daniel's; and then you need not fear any enemy, nor any trouble. Perhaps you may never have such cruel enemies as Daniel had; and never be in such trouble and difficulty as he was. But some trouble you must have, if you live long in this world. And who can give you true comfort then? Only God, Daniel's God, Daniel's Saviour. He is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation."

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CHAPTER XLII.

THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVES.

DARIUS did not live long after this; and, when he died, Cyrus became king of Media. Cyrus was a very wise and powerful prince. He was king of Persia, as well as Media; and had great possessions, and made many conquests, and gave many wise and good laws to his subjects. But one thing that Cyrus did was better than all the rest. What was it? It was the proclamation which he made, that all the captive Jews in his kingdom should return to Jerusalem, and build a temple there again to the Lord their God. It was God himself who put this good thought into the heart of Cyrus, and taught him to show kindness to the people of Judah. Many years before it had been prophesied, that after seventy years' captivity, Judah should return to their own land; and now that the right time was come, God found a way to fulfil his promise. What God says, he always does. We may think many things

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very hard; they may be hard to us, but not to God; for "With God all things are possible." He can incline the hearts of men to do as he pleases, and to fulfil his will, as Cyrus did.

But what was the proclamation of Cyrus? It was this: "Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia; the Lord God of Heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he hath commanded me to build him an house at Jerusalem. Who is there among you of his people? Let his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel." How rejoiced the poor captives were to hear this proclamation; and how thankful they felt to their kind and faithful God! Cyrus returned the holy vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem. There were five thousand four hundred of them, all of gold and silver; and these were given to the Jews, to carry again to Judea, for the temple they were going to build. The captives very soon made all ready to return to their own land; and looked for the last time upon Babylon, where they had spent so many years of trouble, and rejoiced to think that they should never see it

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again. They had a long journey to take; but they were so happy to go, that they did not care for any trouble on the road. How many returned to Jerusalem? forty two thousand three hundred and sixty; and a great many servants, and maids, and singers; and all their horses, and asses, and mules, and camels, they took with them too;—a very great number.

When they came to the end of their long journey, and found themselves once again in their own beloved land, the first thing they thought about was the building of the temple. They had long been without a temple, in a heathen land where their own God was not worshipped; but now they could build a house where they might praise and pray to him; and they began this good work directly. All were willing to give their riches to help forward the building. But before the temple was built, an altar was set up, and the priests offered sacrifices upon it every morning and evening. And they kept all the feasts which God had commanded them to keep, and tried in every thing to obey his laws. Joshua was high priest, and Zerubbabel was governor;

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they were both holy men, and encouraged and helped the people in what was right.

In about a year, all was ready to begin the temple. They had cedar trees from Lebanon, and money enough to pay the carpenters and masons; all helped in the building, and the Levites were appointed to direct the work, and to see that everything was done rightly. Then the people assembled to see the foundation of the house laid. It was a joyful and glorious day at Jerusalem. The priests were there in their robes, and the Levites, with instruments of music, to praise the Lord. Then "they sang together, praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever to Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

But there were some people weeping in the midst of all this joy. Who were they, and why did they weep? They were the old men who had returned to Jerusalem. They were so old, that they remembered the first temple which had stood there seventy years before. They had worshipped in it, and seen its beauty; now

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they saw it in ruins; they could never worship in it again. They might have a new temple; but not one so beautiful, nor large, nor glorious, as the temple of Solomon was; *that* was gone for ever. These thoughts made the old men weep; but they wept in thankfulness, as well as in sorrow. The young people, who had been born in Babylon, and had never seen the first temple, had no remembrance to make them sad; they felt only gladness, and they shouted aloud for joy; so there was a sound of weeping, and a sound of rejoicing too; and the noise was heard afar off.

All our pleasant days are like this happy day among the Jews; there is joy in them, and sorrow too. We can never be *quite* happy here: our happiest hours must have some sadness in them. Young people, perhaps, think that all is bright, and beautiful, and pleasant; but those who are older, and think more, have much to make them feel sad; and they often weep, when the young are gay, and merry, and joyful. The older we grow, the more we shall find to make us sad and sorrowful. And why is this? Why is the world so full of sorrow? Because it is so full

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of sin. Sin is the cause of sorrow. Before man disobeyed God, this was a happy world; but directly he sinned, it became a world of sorrow. When God's people are unhappy here, they love to remember that they are soon going to another world, where there is no sorrow, because there is no sin. They will never weep in Heaven. There "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

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CHAPTER XLIII.

PERSECUTION.

THE Jews had many discouragements from their enemies while they were building their new temple. Who were these enemies? They were the people who had been sent from Assyria, many years before, to live in Samaria and other cities, after the ten tribes had gone into captivity. These people knew a little of the true God, and sacrificed to him; but they did not serve him aright; for they worshipped idols as well as God; and made him very angry. When these enemies heard what the people of Judah were doing, they came to Zerubbabel, and pretended to be very friendly, and said, "Let us build with you, for we seek God as you do, and sacrifice to him, and serve him." But Zerubbabel and Joshua knew that these people did not truly love God; so they answered, "No, you have nothing to do with us; we do not want your help; we can build God's house ourselves, as Cyrus commanded us." This made the enemies very angry;

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and they determined to trouble the people of Judah, and prevent the building of the temple. While Cyrus was living, the Samaritans could not do much to hurt the Jews; but after his death, they wrote a letter to the new king of Persia, full of cruel and wicked accusations against God's people. What did they say in the letter? They told the king that the Jews were rebellious and wicked people, who were building a city which would be very hurtful to Persia. And then they asked the king to command the Jews to leave off building, and not to let them finish their city and temple. And did the king attend to what these enemies said? Yes; he was afraid that the people of Judah might grow powerful, and rebel against him, and give him trouble; so he wrote to the Samaritans, and told them to command the Jews to leave off building directly. The enemies were very much pleased with this answer to their letter; and they went in great haste to Jerusalem, to tell the people of Judah what the king had said. The Jews had every thing ready for the building of the temple; and all were at work very busily when the message came. Their enemies spoke unkindly to them;

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and told them to leave off directly, and put away all their things, and dismiss the carpenters and masons, and do no more work; and said that, if they disobeyed, the king would be very angry, and punish them for rebelling against his law. This was a sad disappointment to the Jews, but they could not resist their enemies; so they submitted quietly, and waited in patience God's time, They knew they must succeed at last, and finish their temple and their city, because God himself had promised that they should; but they felt it very hard to wait patiently many long years before they could begin their work again.

When people are busy and active in God's service, they often have troubles, and disappointments, and difficulties. Satan does not like holy things to prosper; and he stirs up his own servants to hate and persecute the servants of God. We read in history, many sad stories of the persecutions which good people have suffered because they were so active in the service of God. Many of the holy men who preached the gospel after Christ's ascension to Heaven, suffered very much from the unbelieving Jews, and heathen kings and em-

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perors. Stephen, and James, and Peter, and Paul, and many more, were put to death by their cruel enemies, for teaching poor ignorant people the way to Heaven. And many years after, at the time of the Reformation, when wise and good men tried to put an end to the follies and errors of Popery, they too were dreadfully persecuted and many of them burnt to death, by their Roman Catholic enemies. The Bible tells us, that all those who try to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, "must suffer persecution." God's people know this; and they are ready and willing to suffer, if it be his will. But, like the Jews we have been reading about, they have one thing to comfort them. They know that God's work must prosper at last; for God himself has said, that a time will come when there will be no cruel persecutions; when all will know and serve the Lord; and when his will shall "Be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

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CHAPTER XLIV.

THE NEW TEMPLE.

Did the Jews at last finish their temple? Yes; after many years, there was a new king of Persia, named Darius, and he was kind and friendly to the Jews. The time was now come for God's house to be built; and the good prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, told the people to arise and work. But the Jews had been so long idle, and so often hindered and persecuted, that they were not willing to work at first. They said, "The time is not yet come for the Lord's house to be built. If we begin, our enemies will soon make us leave off again, as they did before." But God was displeased with the Jews for saying this. It showed that they had very little faith in him, and trusted very little in his power and help; so he sent a message to them by Haggai, to tell them how angry he was. This was the message: "Is it time for you to dwell in your ceiled houses, and my house lie waste? Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways."

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God showed his displeasure, by not blessing his people. He gave them no rain, and no dew; and the grass dried up, and the fruits did not ripen: and there was very little corn, and oil, and wine. And why was this? God himself told them why. He said, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm. Why? Because mine house is waste, and ye run every man to his own house. Therefore the Heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will bless you." If we do not attend to the work of God, we cannot have his blessing upon our own work. Nothing will prosper with us, if we do not first attend to the things of God. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all other things shall be added unto you."

But did the Jews obey the command which

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Haggai brought them? Yes; "the people did fear before the Lord;" and the two good men, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest, helped and encouraged them to arise and build. And did the work prosper? Yes; their enemies tried indeed to hinder them, and wrote letters to Darius to tell him what the Jews were doing. But Darius determined to see for himself whether the Jews were right or not, in building the temple; and whether Cyrus had really given them leave. So he sought in the house where the books, and papers, and rolls were kept, and there he found the written proclamation of Cyrus. You remember what the proclamation was. It was the kind letter which Cyrus wrote to the Jews, telling them they might return to Jerusalem, and build the temple of God. When Darius had read this, he wrote directly, and commanded that the Jews should be allowed to build the temple; and that bullocks, and rams, and lambs, and all they needed for their sacrifices, should be given them; and that if any man dared to hinder them, his house should be pulled down, and himself hanged. The Jews rejoiced when this message came to them. The work went on,

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and prospered, and God blessed them, because now they were obeying him, and doing his work. The rain came, and the dew; and the corn sprang up, and the fruit ripened; and they had plenty of oil and wine; and all was well with them, because they had God's smile, and God's blessing. In a few years, the temple was finished; and then they kept the dedication with great joy and thankfulness, praising God who had so blessed them, and prospered their work.

If we serve God as actively and faithfully as these Jews did, we shall have his blessing too. There are many ways in which we may serve God. He has given work to all his servants, and he is not pleased if they are idol and slothful. Our great business is to learn to know and love God ourselves; but then we must try to help others also to know and love him. There are many temples to be built for his worship still. Many countries are now without churches, and without ministers; desolate and waste, as Jerusalem was before the holy temple was built again. What can we do? Can we go to those heathen lands, and build the churches, and preach to the

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people there? Perhaps we cannot go *ourselves*, but we may help to send *others;* we may give our money, as the Jews so willingly gave their's, for the building of God's temple. It is selfish to live in our happy country, where we have so many churches, and ministers, and Bibles, without caring for the poor people in distant countries who have none of these blessings. If we really love God ourselves, we shall be anxious for all the world to love him too.

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CHAPTER XLV.

QUEEN VASHTI.

We are now going to read a story about some Jews who were living in Persia, while their brethren were building the temple at Jerusalem. The king who was now reigning in Persia, is called in the Bible Ahasuerus. He was a rich and powerful king; and his possessions were very large indeed; he reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces. We often read about great, and rich, and powerful kings; let us always remember, that greatness, and riches, and power, cannot make people happy. Only God's blessing can give us real, true happiness. With this, the poorest person may be peaceful and contented; without it, the richest kings must be discontented and miserable.

King Ahasuerus made a great feast for his princes, and nobles, and servants; and showed them his riches, and all the fine things he possessed. The feast lasted one hundred and eighty days; and when it was ended, Ahasuerus made another feast, for seven more days,

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for all the people both great and small; and this feast was in the court of the garden of the king's palace. The place where the company met was very beautiful and splendid. The curtains were white, and green, and blue; and the pillars, to which they where fastened, were of fine marble. The couches, or sofas, were of gold and silver; and the floor was a pavement of blue, and red, and black, and white marble. The king gave his friends every thing they could wish to eat and to drink: and the wine which they drank was poured into beautiful vessels of gold.

The ladies were not at the king's feast; but they all met in the palace, where a feast was made for them by the queen whose name was Vashti. Before the feast was ended, king Ahasuerus wished to see the queen, and to shew her to all the princes and people; so he sent a message to her, by seven of his servants, desiring her to come. But Vashti did not like to come, and she refused to obey the king's command; so the messengers returned to the king without her.

Ahasuerus was very angry with the queen for this disobedience, and determined to punish

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her; but first he asked advice of the princes and wise men who were his friends, and said, "What shall we do by law to queen Vashti because she has disobeyed the king's command?" Then one of the princes answered, "Vashti ought to be punished for what she has done; for if she is not, the women in Persia will learn to be like her, and will disobey and despise their husbands; and that will give us all great trouble. Let the king send Vashti away, and choose another and a better queen; and let a law be made, commanding all wives to honour and obey their husbands, that we have no more rebellion and disobedience." The king was pleased with this advice, and did as the princes wished. The law was made, and Vashti was sent away in disgrace. A little time before, she had been a great queen, rich and honourable; now she had lost her crown, and her power, and her riches; and was hated, and despised, and disgraced. Poor Vashti! when she looked upon her fine things for the last time, she must have felt how vain and foolish they all were. There is nothing in this world that will stay with us long. Money, honour, power. friends,—all go away

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from us very soon; and then we must say what Solomon said,—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

It was unkind of Ahasuerus to command Vashti to do what she did not like; but it was very wrong of Vashti to refuse to obey her king and husband. The Bible says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands;" and, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." If this king and queen had known and loved God, the one would not have been unkind, and the other would not have been disobedient; and then they would have lived happily and peacefully together in love, without quarrelling, and at last parting in such a sad way. But Ahasuerus and Vashti knew very little about the true God, and his holy laws. How thankful we ought to be that we have the Bible to teach us what is right! Let us remember, always to read and attend to it; and pray for God's grace to help us to obey its commands. And if we do obey them, we shall be happier than Vashti and king Ahasuerus in the fine palace of Persia.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

THE NEW QUEEN.

When his passion was over, Ahasuerus began to think about Vashti, and to feel sorry for what he had done. People are often vexed about the things they have done in anger, when it is too late for sorrow to do any good. How foolish it is to be angry and passionate! Pray to God to help you to conquer these sinful tempers, and ask him to make you meek, and gentle, and forgiving.

Ahasuerus did not call Vashti back again, but he determined to have a new queen: so he commanded all the beautiful young women in his kingdom to be brought to the palace, that he might see them, and choose one from among them, and make her queen. A great many young women came to the palace, but the Bible tells us about only one of them. Her name was Esther. She was a Jewess; and her parents and friends had been carried captive to Babylon, with Jehoiachin, many years before. Esther's father and mother both

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died, and left their poor child a little orphan captive. How sad for Esther to be left an orphan and a prisoner in a strange land! But God took care of this little girl when her parents could take care of her no more.

Esther had a relation named Mordecai. He was a good man, and a kind friend to this poor orphan; for when her parents died, he took her to live with him as his own daughter. Esther grew up to be very beautiful; but the Bible does not praise her for her beauty. We have often read, that God does not look at the outward appearance, but at the heart; holiness is what pleases him, not beauty. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." And did Esther fear the Lord? Yes; we may hope that she began early to seek the God of Israel; and that he was her father, when her earthly father was gone. She was a gentle, affectionate, obedient child to Mordecai; for all who truly love and obey God as their heavenly Father will love and obey earthly parents too. Mordecai had been like a father to Esther, and she knew that she ought to honour and love him very much.

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When the king commanded all the young women to be brought to the palace, Mordecai let Esther go with them; but every day he went to the palace to ask how she was; for he loved her, and felt very anxious about her. The king, and the people in the palace, did not know that Esther was a Jewess. Mordecai had desired her not to tell him this, and Esther kept the secret as he wished. Mordecai did not desire Esther to tell a lie; that would have been very wrong; it is never right to say what is untrue; but, sometimes, it may be right and wise not to tell all we know. Mordecai thought it best that Esther should not be known as a Jewess, in a place where the Jews had so many enemies.

When the young women were brought before the king, he liked Esther better than any of them, and chose her for his queen. So he took the crown, and put it upon her head; and then he made a great feast for his princes and servants; and all the people rejoiced very much because Esther was queen. This was a great honour to Esther! She was taken to live in a fine palace, and had every thing she could desire. But Esther had great need now

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of God's help and guidance, for she had many temptations in the palace; riches, and worldly pleasures, and vain company. We may hope that she asked God to keep her from loving these things too much; and that he heard her prayer. It is very sinful to love the world more than we love God. What does the Bible say about it? "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

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CHAPTER XLVII.

HAMAN.

MORDECAI had a place by the king's gate, where he sat every day. Esther had now a more honourable place than Mordecai, for she sat upon the throne; but Esther did not forget her kind friend after she was queen. She still remembered and loved him; and attended to all he said, as obediently as when she was living with him. This showed how dutiful, and affectionate, and grateful, Esther was. She was very right to be so. Try to be like her; never forget an old and kind friend. "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not."

While Mordecai was sitting in his place by the gate, he made himself very useful to the king. Two of the servants made a conspiracy to kill Ahasuerus. Mordecai discovered the conspiracy, and went directly, and told Esther; and she told the king what Mordecai had said. The accusation was found to be true; and the two wicked men were taken, and hanged upon

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a tree. Mordecai did very right to tell the king about this conspiracy. Good subjects, and good servants, ought to be careful of the safety of their kings and masters. If they know of a secret enemy, it is their duty to tell of that enemy, and not to conceal him. Those servants do very wrong, who see others trying to injure their master, and do not let the master know about it. They are not faithful and honest like Mordecai.

Did the king thank and reward Mordecai very much? No, he gave him nothing; but the story of the conspiracy, and the discovery of it, was written in a book, and put away in a safe place, that it might not be lost nor forgotten. We shall soon read about this book again.

There was a man in the palace whom the king loved very much, named Haman. He was not a good man; he was proud, and cruel, and deceitful; but the king honoured him, and commanded his subjects to honour him too, for Ahasuerus did not know at first how very wicked Haman was. Every time Haman passed, the servants in the king's gate bowed to him and did him reverence; but Mordecai

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refused to do this. Why? Is it not right to show honour to superiors? Yes; the Bible tells us to give to all the honour which is due to them; but the honour which Haman wanted, was not due to him; he had no right to it. It was idolatrous homage which Haman wished; and Mordecai knew it would be wrong to give that, for he was a wicked man.

The proud man was very angry when he heard this, and determined to punish Mordecai. He wished to kill this poor Jew, and all the Jews in the kingdom too; for Haman hated the Jews. But he had not power himself to destroy them; so he went to the king, and asked him to command them all to be put to death. Haman said, "There are some people scattered about the kingdom, who have laws of their own, and do not keep thy laws. If they are suffered to live, they will do much hurt; therefore, if it please the king, let them be destroyed; and I will pay those who do the business; and the money shall be brought into the king's treasury." Haman thought he should soon repay himself, by taking the money which belonged to the Jews whom he wished to destroy. Did Haman tell the king that Mordecai had re-

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fused to bow, and do him honour? No; Haman said nothing about that He was ashamed, perhaps, of confessing his foolish pride to the king. People are often ashamed of a fellow-creature knowing their faults; and yet they are not ashamed of God knowing them. We can sometimes hide a sin from man; but we can never hide it from God. His eye sees all the secrets of our hearts, all the wicked thoughts there. He remembers, and writes them down in his book; and he will punish them at last, if they are not repented of, and blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ. Pray, then, that the sins of your heart may be pardoned; say, as David did, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE JEWS IN DANGER.

Did Ahasuerus attend to Haman's cruel wish? Yes, he did. He took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman, and said, "All the money shall be thine, and the people too. Do with them as thou thinkest best." Then Haman went away very much pleased; and wrote letters to the governors of all the provinces, in the king's name, and sealed them with the king's seal, and sent them by posts to every place in the kingdom. What did Haman say in these letters? He commanded, that on the thirteenth of the month Adar, all the Jews, young and old, men, women, and little children, should be destroyed; and their riches and possessions taken way. All the people were to be ready for that dreadful day, —the thirteenth of the month Adar. The posts went out, and hastened to carry the letters as the king commanded; and then Haman came to the king, and sat down to eat and drink with him. They were both quite careless

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about the sufferings of the poor Jews. The Jews were weeping, and full of sorrow; but Ahasuerus and Haman could eat, and drink, and talk, and laugh, without thinking about them, or pitying them. Were they not very selfish, and cruel, and unfeeling? Yes, they were; but let us remember that our hearts too, are, by nature, hard and selfish. We should pray God to give us his Holy Spirit, that we may be made kind, merciful, gentle, and full of love.

Was not Mordecai in great trouble now? Yes; when he heard what was done, he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry. And in all the provinces, wherever the letters went, there was great crying, and fasting, and weeping among the Jews; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. And Esther, too, was very, very sorry. She could not be happy, because her dear friend Mordecai was in so much trouble. She sent a message to him; and gave him new raiment, and asked him to put off his sackcloth, and to be comforted; for Esther did not know at first what made Mordecai so unhappy. When the

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raiment was sent, he would not receive it, nor put off his sackcloth, nor take comfort; he still stayed where he was, weeping as he did before; and the messenger went back, and told Esther. Then Esther called one of her servants, who was named Hatach, and told him to go again, and ask Mordecai why he wept so bitterly. So the servant went, and gave him the queen's message; and then Mordecai told Hatach of the king's command, and gave him one of the letters to shew to Esther, and sent a message, to beg her to go to the king, and ask him to spare her people.

When Hatach told Esther what Mordecai had said, and what he wished, she was in very great difficulty and trouble. Was she unwilling to ask the king to spare the Jews? No; but she felt afraid at first, because there was a law in Persia, forbidding any one, who was not called, to come before the king. Whoever dared to disobey this law, was put to death, unless the king held out his sceptre,—then the person was forgiven. Ahasuerus had not called Esther for thirty days; and she said to Hatach, "How can I go to the king when he has not sent for me? I shall make him

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very angry; perhaps he will put me to death and what will become of my poor people then?" So Hatach went again to Mordecai, and told him what Esther said. But Mordecai would not despair. He knew that it was right to do all he could to save himself and his people; and he trusted that God would deliver them now, as he had often delivered them before. So Mordecai sent another message to queen Esther. He told her it was her duty to go and speak to the king; and that she could not have God's blessing if she did not. And then he encouraged her too. He told her, that he believed that God would deliver his people, and had made her queen that she might be able to speak to Ahasuerus, and intercede for them when they had no other friend.

As soon as Esther heard this, she determined to do what Mordecai desired. But she remembered that there was another king, greater and more powerful than Ahasuerus, whose help she must ask first. Who was this great king? God himself. He is the King over all the world. The greatest earthly kings, can only do what he permits. Esther

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knew that he could, if he pleased, make Ahasuerus kind and merciful; and she determined to pray to this great God, and ask his help, and then go to the king. So he called the messengers again, and told them to return this answer to Mordecai: "Go, and gather together all the Jews that are in the city, and fast and pray for me night and day; and I and my maidens will fast and pray too, and afterwards I will go and speak to the king. If God please, he will answer my prayer, and protect me, and deliver my people; and if not, I am ready and willing to die."

Mordecai was very glad to have this message. He saw now that Esther was determined to do her duty; and that she would do it in the right way, asking help from God. Mordecai had much faith in God, and trusted in him for deliverance in this time of danger. He remembered that "God is a very present help in trouble."

Then Mordecai called all the Jews in the city, and told them what Esther was going to do; and asked them to fast and pray for her, as she wished, the three days before she went to the king. The Jews were willing to do

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this; so they, and Mordecai, and Esther, all fasted, and wept, and prayed before God. It was a very solemn time. The queen and her maidens were fasting, and weeping, and praying, in the palace; and Mordecai and the Jews in the city; none of them eat or drank for three days. But what a comfort it was for these poor people to have God for their friend now! When we are in trouble, we ought to do what they did. We may never have such trouble as Esther had; but very often we may be in danger and difficulty; and then we should tell all our sorrows to God, and ask help from him. And he is willing to hear us; he says, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will deliver thee."

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CHAPTER XLIX.

ESTHER'S FEAST.

The three days passed, and the time came for Esther to go to the king. Was she frightened? Perhaps she did feel a little frightened. She was going to the king when he had not called for her; and perhaps he might be very angry, and not hold out the sceptre to her and then she would be put to death. This was a fearful thought; but Esther was determined to go, trusting in God, and she knew that nothing could hurt her without his permission.

The king was sitting upon his throne in his palace, when Esther came in. She looked very anxiously to see if he would hold out the sceptre, that she might know whether she should live or die. When Ahasuerus looked up, and saw Esther standing in the court so humbly and timidly, he pitied and loved her very much, and held out his sceptre, and called her to him. So Esther went, and touched the sceptre. But

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Esther.—p. 216.

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how thankful she felt now! The king was not angry but pleased with her; he did not command her to be put to death, but smiled, and said, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be given thee." This was wonderful kindness indeed! But Esther did not like to tell Ahasuerus about the Jews directly. She wanted time to think of her petition, and to ask God to give her courage and wisdom; so she only said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come to day to the feast I have made ready for them." Why did Esther ask Haman to the feast? Did she not know what a cruel, wicked man he was? Yes, she knew this; and soon she meant to tell the king all the truth about Haman, but now Esther wished to be wise and cautious in all she did, not quick and hasty. God had given Esther wisdom, because she had asked him for it. When we have very difficult work to do, we ought, like this good queen, to pray for wisdom, to do it rightly. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him."

Did Ahasuerus promise to come to the feast? Yes; he went, and Haman went with him.

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Esther was very attentive to the king, and tried to please him; and Ahasuerus liked every thing that he saw, and every thing that Esther said and did. While they were at the feast, the king said again to Esther, "What is thy petition? What is thy desire? I will give it thee, whatever it may be." Did Esther ask then that the poor Jews might be spared? No, the time was not yet come; she wanted to pray and think about her petition still more; so she said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come to-morrow to the feast I shall prepare for them; and then I will make my petition, as the king hath said."

Haman felt proud of his honour in being invited twice, with the king, to Esther's feast; and he went home, that day, thinking very much of himself. As he passed the king's gate, he saw Mordecai sitting there; and Mordecai did not bow, nor stand up, nor show him any honour. This made Haman very angry; but he tried to hide his anger. When he came to his house, he called his wife and his friends, and boasted to them of his glory and his riches. He said, "The king likes me better than any of his princes and servants; and queen

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Esther honours me too. I was at her feast to-day, and she has invited me to come again to-morrow with the king. I am the only man who is so honoured; but yet all my riches, and honours, and glory, cannot content me, while I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then Zeresh, Haman's wife, answered, "Do not be vexed about this. Let us make a very high gallows, and to-morrow speak thou to the king, that Mordecai may be hanged upon the gallows; and then go thou in merrily to the feast." Haman was very much pleased with what cruel Zeresh said, and commanded that the gallows should be made directly. But could Haman feel happy then? No; he had riches, and honours, and,—what pleased him better,—the hope of revenge on the morrow; but all these things could not give him peace nor comfort. Haman's heart was full of evil thoughts; anger, and passion, and revenge, and murder too, were there, and God's curse and God's frown were upon him. See how sad it is to let sin stay in our hearts, instead of praying God to pardon it, and take it away. Ask him to make you humble, and to give you that holy love, "Which is not puf-

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fed up, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." Then you will have true peace in your heart, and God's smile and blessing will be upon you.

CHAPTER L.

THE RESTLESS NIGHT.

THAT night, when king Ahasuerus lay down upon his bed, he could not sleep. He was not ill, nor in pain, nor trouble; all was pleasant and comfortable around him; but still, when he shut his eyes, and tried to rest, he found he could not; his sleep was gone. It was God who made Ahasuerus so restless and wakeful that night, and we shall soon know why.

Sleep is a great blessing. Our poor weak bodies grow weary after a long, busy day; and it is very pleasant to have a comfortable bed to lie upon, and quiet sleep to refresh us, when we are tired, and to awake in the morning strong and well again. How thankful we

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should be to God who gives us these blessings, and keeps us safely in the long dark night! David says, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." But, sometimes, we cannot sleep. Like Ahasuerus we are wakeful and restless all night long. What should we do then? David also tells us what he did when he could not sleep. He says, "I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." And God's people like to do so too. When all is dark and quiet around, and no earthly friend can see them, then they love to remember that the eye of God is still upon them. He never slumbers nor sleeps: he is near to hear their prayers and their praises, and to love, and bless them, and give them peace. Do you love God? Then you may be very happy in long wakeful nights, even when pain and illness make you restless. You may think of your kind Father in Heaven, who gives you many, many blessings; but who is sometime pleased to take them away, for wise reasons which you cannot know now. And you may think too of that bright, happy world, to which you will go

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soon, if you are God's child, where there is no pain, no weariness.

But Ahasuerus had no plasant thoughts like these to comfort him when he lay restless in his bed; so at last he arose, and called his servants, and told them to bring a book, and read to him. It was right of Ahasuerus to wish to employ himself; for he had much business to do, as all kings, and queens, and great men, have. What book did he choose? He told his servants to bring that book in which the history of his kingdom, and the acts of the kings were written. The conspiracy which Mordecai discovered had been recorded there; but Ahasuerus had forgotten this long ago. The servant who read to the king, soon came to the story of the conspiracy; and when Ahasuerus heard it, he remembered the faithfulness of Mordecai, and how useful he had been. Then Ahasuerus asked, "What honour has been done to Mordecai? How has he been rewarded?" The servants answered, "Nothing has been done for him." Then the king said, "Mordecai must be rewarded now for his services. Go into the court and see who is there;

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I will consult with my friends how I may best honour this good man."

So the servants went into the court, and there they found Haman; for he was coming very early to speak about Mordecai, and, to ask the king to have him hanged upon the gallows which had been just made. The servants called Haman, and brought him to Ahasuerus; but Haman did not know why he was called, and Ahasuerus did not know what Haman wished to say, and why he was so early in the court.

When Haman came in, the king did not tell him, at first, who the person was whom he was so anxious to reward; he only said to him, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" Then Haman thought, "Who can this man be? It must be myself, for the king likes me better than any of the princes in his kingdom. And now he is going to honour me; what honour shall I choose? What shall I ask him to do for me?" When Haman had thought a little, he said, "Let the king's garments be brought, and his horse, and his golden crown: and then let one of the princes take the man whom the king is pleased to

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honour, and clothe him in the royal garments, and put the crown upon his head, and set him upon the horse, and bring him on horseback through the city; and let it be proclaimed aloud, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour." Then Ahasuerus said, "The man whom I wish to honour is Mordecai the Jew. He did me a kind service a long time ago, and has had no reward. Now, do as thou hast said. Make haste, and take the royal garments, and the crown, and the horse; and bring Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the gate, and let him ride through the city in triumph; and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

Haman felt very much disappointed to hear all this, and very angry too; but he could not disobey the king, nor accuse Mordecai now; so he went out, and called Mordecai, and clothed him in the royal garments, and put him upon the king's horse, and led him through the city, proclaiming before him what Ahasuerus had commanded. But when all was over, Haman hastened home to his house,

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full of sorrow, and told Zeresh all that had happened. And did she comfort him in his disappointment? No; she and her friends were as much frightened and vexed as Haman was; and they all said, "Thou shalt not have any power against Mordecai, but shalt surely fall before him." This troubled Haman still more; and he waited, sad and sorrowful, till the time came for him to go to Esther's feast. But how did Mordecai feel now? He must have felt very thankful to God who was giving him so much favour with the king; but Mordecai was not proud of his honours, like wicked Haman. Mordecai was humble, as all God's servants must be; and when he returned from riding through the city, he went again to the king's gate, and attended to his duties there, without boasting of his honours, or saying one unkind word to his enemy Haman.

And now we can tell why God had taken away sleep from the king that night. It was because the time had come, the right and best time for Mordecai to be delivered. Esther, and Mordecai, and the Jews, had been many days praying and fasting, and weeping, and

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no deliverance came; and perhaps sometimes they had thought that God would not hear their prayers, nor save them from their enemies. But he had heard them all the time; and just at the right moment, before wicked Haman came in, God made the king restless and wakeful, and put it into his heart to ask to have the book read which inclined him to be kind to Mordecai. God does not always answer our prayers how and when *we* please, but how and when *he* pleases. We are very foolish and ignorant, and cannot tell what is best for us; but he knows what we need, and the right time for giving it to us. Then let us trust this kind God, and wait patiently for his answer to our prayers. "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

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CHAPTER LI.

HAMAN PUNISHED.

THE king came to the feast as he promised and brought Haman with him. Ahasuerus had not forgotten Esther's petition, and now he said to her again, "What is thy petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted thee." It is a great honour to be allowed to speak to a king, and make a request to him; an honour few people have. You have never spoken to an earthly king; perhaps you have never even seen one; but there is a king, greater, much greater, than Ahasuerus, to whom you may speak every day, and who promises to grant your requests. You know who this great king is;—Christ himself. He is the "King of kings, and Lord of lords." He invites you to come to him, and ask him for what you want: and he will never send you away. He says, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." And the Lord Jesus Christ promises to give better things than Ahasuerus could. He can give pardon, and peace,

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and the Holy Spirit, and eternal life in Heaven He is willing, too, to give these good gifts; he says, "Ask, and it shall be given you." "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

But what did Esther say when the king spoke so kindly to her? She had now no need to fear; Ahasuerus had promised to grant her request, and his heart was kindly inclined to the Jews; God had made it so. Esther now felt that the right time was come for making her petition; so she said at once, "If it please the king, let my life be given at my petition, and my people at my request; for it is commanded, that I and my people should all be destroyed and slain."

The king wondered very much when he heard what Esther said, and asked angrily, "What enemy of thy people has dared to do this?" Then Esther turned to Haman, and said, "This wicked Haman is the man, who is the enemy of my people, the Jews; and he has accused them to the king, and asked for their destruction. Then Ahasuerus rose up angrily, and went out into the palace garden; and Haman fell down before Esther, and begged for his

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life, for he saw that he was in very great danger. But there was no hope for Haman now. The king soon came back, and gave commandment to his servants to cover Haman's face, which was the sign for execution. As they were carrying Haman away, one of the king's servants said, "Haman has made a gallows to hang Mordecai upon; and it is now in Haman's house." So Ahasuerus commanded that Haman should be hanged upon his own gallows, which he had made for Mordecai.

This was the dreadful end of this proud and cruel man! And all people who live like Haman, will come to an end as dreadful as his, if they do not repent before it is too late. Wicked men are often punished in this world. They may be in great favour and prosperity for many years; but, at last, their deceitfulness is found out, as Haman's was, and then they lose their friends, and their honour, and, perhaps, their life, and die in disgrace and misery. But, sometimes, the wicked are not punished in this world. Their fellow-creatures may not find out their crimes; so they

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escape, perhaps, all their lives. But God takes notice of these wicked people. He knows all their sinful actions, and thoughts too, and writes every one of them in the book of his remembrance. And at the day of judgment, when that book will be read, what must become of rebellious, impenitent sinners? The Bible tells us,—"The trangressors shall be destroyed together; the end of the wicked shall be cut off."

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CHAPTER LII.

THE JEWS DELIVERED.

THAT day, Ahasuerus gave Haman's house to queen Esther; and he called Mordecai, and gave him the ring which Haman had worn, and honoured him very much. Ahasuerus knew now that Esther was a Jewess, and that Mordecai was her relation, because she had told him. There was no need to keep this a secret any longer. But Esther had not yet all she wanted; so she went to the king again, and when he held out the sceptre, she said, "If it please the king, let it be written to reverse the letters which Haman wrote to destroy the Jews. How can I bear to see the evil that shall come upon my people? How can I bear to see all my family destroyed?" Ahasuerus was very willing to do as Esther wished, but he would not alter the decree. But he gave Mordecai authority to provide for the defence of the Jews in any way he thought proper. Then Mordecai wrote the letters, and sealed them with the king's ring, and sent them

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by post on horses, and mules, and camels. In these letters, the king commanded the Jews to gather themselves together on the thirteenth of the month Adar; and to be ready to defend themselves, and to fight, and slay, and destroy all their enemies who should try to hurt them. Then Mordecai went out of the palace, to tell the good news to all the poor sorrowing Jews in the city. He was dressed in royal garments, blue and white, with a great crown of gold upon his head. That was a happy day for the Jews! They threw off their sackcloth, and wiped away their tears, and began to rejoice, and to praise God who had done such wonderful things for them. All was feasting, and joy, and gladness, among the Jews throughout the land, wherever the posts came!

At last, the day came in which the Jews were to have been slain. Their enemies had hoped to destroy them all; but God had determined to deliver his people, and they were safe. The Jews gathered themselves together, as Ahasuerus commanded; and the rulers of the provinces helped them to fight against all who assaulted them. Very many of these cruel enemies were slain; and, amongst

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them, the ten sons of Haman, who were hanged upon the gallows which their father had made.

When all their enemies were subdued, the Jews made a great feast on the fifteenth day of the month Adar. It was a very joyful day; and they determined to keep it every year, that they might not forget their great and wonderful deliverance. This yearly feast the Jews call the feast of Purim. They were right to keep this day in remembrance. When God sends us any great mercy, when he delivers us from danger, or death, or trouble, then we too ought to remember his goodness to us; and every time the day returns, we should thank him for his mercies, and say as David did, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

We read very little more in the Bible about Mordecai and Esther. Mordecai became a very great man, and was much honoured and loved by the king. He had great riches, and great power; and he made the best use of all he had; he tried to do good with it. This

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is the right use to make of money and power. We should not be selfish, and think only of ourselves; but remember, as Mordecai did, to be kind to others, and to try to do them good. St. Paul says, "Charge them that are rich, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute." Haman had tried very hard to destroy Mordecai; but now Haman was dead, and all his sons were dead and Mordecai was living in happiness, and honour, and safety. Why was this? Because Mordecai trusted in God. God never forsakes those who trust in him. They may be in sorrow for a little time, but deliverance will come at last. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in the time of trouble. The Lord shall help them, and deliver them; he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in him."

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CHAPTER LIII.

EZRA'S PRAYER.

We have not read about the Jews in Jerusalem for a long time. What were they doing? Soon after the deliverance of Mordecai, while Ahasuerus was still reigning in Persia, many more of the captives went from Babylon to their own home in Canaan. One of these Jews was named Ezra. He was a Levite, a priest, and a scribe or writer of God's law. Ezra was a very learned man; and, what is better, he was a very good man too; he loved and served God. When the king gave him leave to go to Jerusalem, he felt very glad; for he wished to see his beloved country again, and to teach his people there the holy law of God, which he knew and loved so well. Ahasuerus was very kind to Ezra, and the other Jews, and gave them all the silver and gold they could find in Babylon, to buy offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem. God took care of Ezra and his friends, and brought them all safely to Jerusalem. They had many enemies; but

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these good men knew who their best friend was, who could protect them from every danger; and they sought him on their journey, and he heard their prayer, and took care of them. When we go on a journey, we may meet with many dangers; and therefore we should never set off without first asking God's blessing and protection. We should say, as Moses did, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." No journey can be safe or pleasant, if God is not with us to keep and bless us.

When Ezra came to Jerusalem, he heard much that made him very sad. His people were not living in the fear of God. Many of them had mingled with the idolatrous people of Canaan, and married into their families, and were beginning to learn their wicked ways. When Ezra first heard what the people had done, he rent his clothes, and tore off his hair, and sat down full of trouble. Then some of the people, who truly served God, came to him, and sat down by him, and wept too.

Why were they all so unhappy? Because their brethren had sinned against God. It is very sad to see those around us living in wickedness; forgetful of that God who has

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been so kind, and done so much for them. But there is one thing we can do when we feel sorry for wicked people; we can pray God to pity and forgive them. And this was what Ezra did. In the evening, when the sacrifice was offered, he arose, and fell on his knees, and spread out his hands unto God, and prayed. Ezra confessed to God how great had been the people's sin. He said, "O my God, I am ashamed to lift up my face unto thee, for our iniquities are very great. Thou hast given us deliverance, and let some of us escape, that we might build the temple again, and the walls of Jerusalem. But what shall we say after this? We have been very ungrateful to thee for all thy mercies. We have forsaken thy commandments; we have mingled with the people of the nations around us, and learned their evil ways. Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserved, and given us great deliverance; but if we again transgress, we shall make thee still more angry, and how can we hope for mercy then? Wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou hast destroyed us; so that there should be no more deliverance nor escape? O Lord God of Israel,

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thou art righteous; behold we are before thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before thee because of this."

This was Ezra's humble confession of his own sins, and of his people's sins. When we read it, we ought to remember that we too have sinned against God, as these Jews had. We have often forgotten him, and loved the things of the world better than holy things; and disobeyed many, very many, of his commands. What should we do when we remember all these sins? We should do what Ezra did, confess them humbly to God, and ask his forgiveness; and we know that he is ready to forgive all those who ask for pardon, for his dear Son's sake.

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CHAPTER LIV.

THE REPENTANCE OF THE PEOPLE.

When Ezra had finished his prayer, a great many of the people came to him, to the door of God's house. They were, like Ezra, sorry for the sinful things which had been done, and they came weeping very bitterly. They said, "We have sinned against our God; but there is yet hope for us We will make a covenant with our God; and promise to put away all that is displeasing to him, and mingle ourselves with the people of the nations no more. Arise and help us to do this, and we will be with thee." So Ezra arose, and went into a house; but he eat no bread, and drank no water; he was still mourning and fasting, because of the transgression of his people.

Then Ezra made a proclamation, that all the captives who had returned from Babylon, should come to Jerusalem in three days; and that those who did not obey this command, should forfeit all their possessions, and be sent

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away in disgrace. The people were willing to attend to this proclamation. In three days they were all gathered together at Jerusalem; and they sat in the street by the house of God. All looked unhappy. Why? Because they were thinking about their sins, and how they had displeased God. This made them tremble very much. The rain too was falling heavily, and the sky was black with clouds, and there was no pleasant sunshine to warm and cheer them; all was gloomy and sad. Then Ezra arose, and told the people of their sins, and asked them to make confession to God, and to pray for pardon. The people were very penitent; they felt what a sad thing sin is, and wished to have God's forgiveness and blessing again; and they cried with a loud voice, "As thou hast said, so we must do," They not only confessed their sin, but they were willing to put it away too. They separated from their idolatrous friends and companions, and made a covenant with God, and promised to serve him faithfully, with all their hearts.

This was the right way of shewing that they were truly penitent. Some people, when

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they are reproved for doing wrong, say they are sorry, and cry very much; and then go away, and do the same things again. This is not the true sorrow for sin which God desires. It is not that, "Godly sorrow," which "worketh repentance to salvation." Those who are *really* penitent, do as the people did of whom we have just been reading. They are not only sorry for their sin, and confess it, and ask for pardon; but they pray for grace too, that they may be enabled, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to resist, and overcome it. God promises to forgive those who are thus truly penitent, and turn to him with all their hearts. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall have mercy."

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CHAPTER LV.

NEHEMIAH.

HAD all the captives now returned to Jerusalem? No; some still remained in Persia. Among them was a good man named Nehemiah. He was cup-bearer to the king Artaxerxes, the same king who is called Ahasuerus in the history of Esther. He was still reigning; and, perhaps, Esther and Mordecai were living too; but this the Bible does not tell us. Nehemiah was far off from his country; but he still loved it very much; and when he saw any of his friends who had been there, he used to ask them anxiously about Jerusalem.

One day, Nehemiah was told that the people in Jerusalem were in great trouble; and that the walls and gates were broken down, and burnt with fire. This was sad news for Nehemiah. When he heard it, he "sat down, and wept, and mourned many days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven." Like many other good people, of whom we have

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often read in the Bible, Nehemiah had a friend to comfort him in all his trouble, and that friend was God. Nehemiah confessed before God all his own sins, and the sins of the people; and acknowledged that they deserved punishment for their forgetfulness of him. But then Nehemiah asked God to remember his promise made to Moses, many, many years before, that he would gather his people from all countries, and bring them to their own land again. God had not forgotten his promise; he never does forget; but it was right in Nehemiah to speak of it in his prayer, because this showed his faith and trust in God. God likes us to remind him of his own promises, when we pray. Nehemiah prayed too, that he might find favour and mercy with the king. He was going to make a petition to Artaxerxes; and, like Esther, he would not do it without first asking help and wisdom from God.

It was a long time before Nehemiah could speak to the king; but at last he was called to give him wine; for this was the duty of the cup-bearer. Nehemiah looked very sad when

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he came before the king. His sorrowful thoughts about Jerusalem made him so; but Artaxerxes could not tell Nehemiah's thoughts, so he wondered what made him unhappy, and asked, "Why is thy face so sad? Thou art not sick; this is nothing but sorrow of heart; tell me, what has happened to vex and trouble thee?" Then Nehemiah felt very much afraid; but he prayed to God in his heart, and asked for wisdom to enable him to speak as he ought to the king; and then he answered, "Why should I not be sad, when the city of my fathers lieth waste, and the gates of it are burnt with fire?"

God was pleased to hear Nehemiah's prayer; and he inclined Artaxerxes to be kind to the Jews, and willing to help them. The king asked Nehemiah what he wished; and Nehemiah again prayed to the God of Heaven, and then said, "If it please the king, let me be sent unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers, that I may build it." Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah how long the journey would be, and when he would return to Persia; so Nehemiah told him; and then the king gave him leave to go.

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And Artaxerxes wrote some letters to the governors who were in Judah, and commanded them to let Nehemiah go to Jerusalem, and build the walls of the city. Then Nehemiah thanked his God who had made the king so kind to him; and took leave of his friends in Persia, and set off on his journey.

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CHAPTER LVI.

THE WALLS BUILT.

Was Nehemiah very glad to go to Jerusalem again? Yes; but he had many dangers, and difficulties, and enemies to vex and trouble him. There were two wicked men, governors in Judah, who hated the Jews very much, and determined to do all they could to hurt Nehemiah, and prevent him from building the walls of Jerusalem. The names of these men were Tobiah and Sanballat. How sad it is to have such wicked passions and feelings in the heart, as these two men had! We all have those sinful feelings, before our hearts are changed and made new by the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us, that out of the heart come evil thoughts, hatred, anger, murder, and many other dreadful sins. Let us ask God to take them all

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away, and to make the fruits of the Spirit grow in our hearts instead; "Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness."

Nehemiah came safely to Jerusalem, and stayed there quietly three days. All that time, he was thinking what he could do for his poor people and country; and asking God to teach and help him. One night, Nehemiah arose and called a few of his friends, and went out secretly to see the city. He told no one where he was going, nor why he went; he had many thoughts in his heart, but they were known only to God. And what did Nehemiah see as as he rode along? He saw the walls of Jerusalem lying in ruins upon the ground; and the gates broken down, and burnt with fire. The temple was built; but the poor Jews had so many enemies, and so many troubles, that they could not worship God as they wished, nor live in peace in their own land. Nehemiah felt very sad when he looked around and saw everything so waste and desolate.

When Nehemiah had gone round the walls, and mourned over his poor desolate country,

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he returned; but he did not sit down to weep, and do nothing for his city and people. No; he called some of the people and told them all the thoughts which God had put into his heart, and how kind the king had been in giving him leave to go to Jerusalem. Then the people were encouraged to begin to work; and they said, "Let us rise up, and build." "So they strengthened their hands for this good work." Sanballat, and Tobiah, and others, laughed at the Jews; but Nehemiah told his enemies, that the work he had to do was the work of God, and that he would prosper and bless it. So the Jews went on building, and did not attend to what their enemies said.

When Sanballat saw that the walls were almost finished, he felt very angry; but he pretended to despise what the people were doing, and said to his friends, "What can these poor weak Jews do? How can they strengthen themselves? What power have they to build up their city, and to settle in it again?" Then Tobiah answered, "If they do, the building will be so weak, that a fox

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might break down their stone wall." So these wicked men laughed at the Jews; but still the work went on, and, at last, the walls were finished. God was with his people who trusted in him, and he would not suffer their enemies to destroy what he had commanded to be done.

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CHAPTER LVII.

THE DEFENCE OF JERUSALEM.

When the enemies of the Jews heard that the walls were built, they were very angry, and conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem. But Nehemiah was told of this conspiracy, and he prepared to defend himself. First, he prayed to God, and asked help from him; for Nehemiah knew that nothing could hurt him and his people if God protected them. Then he armed some of his servants with swords, and spears, and shields, and bows. The rest went on with the building; but they all held a sword in one hand, while they worked with the other, that they might be ready to defend themselves, if the enemy should come. They kept watch too, all day and all night; and a man with a trumpet stood by Nehemiah, to sound an alarm, if there was any danger, and call the people together in a moment. So all was ready; and then Nehemiah spoke to the people, and said, "Be not afraid; remember the Lord is great and

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terrible; and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." Then the people felt encouraged again, and went on willingly with their work.

Nehemiah was very right to take so much care to defend himself and his people. It is our duty, when we are in danger to do what we can to save ourselves. But we must remember, as Nehemiah did, that all we do will be of no use without the blessing of God; and begin by asking his help and guidance. Then we may feel safe, in all dangers and troubles. And we may learn another lesson from this story. We have not such enemies as the poor Jews had to fight against; but we have enemies of another kind, and we must prepare to resist them as Nehemiah did. You know what these are. Satan, and the wicked world, and our own sinful hearts.

How are we to resist them? When Jesus was speaking to his disciples about temptation, he told them to "Watch and pray." This is what we ought to do. We should "Watch," that Satan may not take us by surprise, and "Pray," that we may be enabled to resist and overcome him.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

NEHEMIAH'S KINDNESS.

NEHEMIAH had not only his cruel enemies to trouble him; his own people vexed him too. Some of the Jews were rich, others were poor; but those who were rich were unkind to their brethren, and took away their lands, and their vineyards, and their oliveyards. So the poor people came to Nehemiah, for he was the governor, and told him all their sorrows. Nehemiah was angry when he heard what had been done; and he called the nobles and rulers, and reproved them. He might have punished these selfish people; but he liked better to speak to them gently, and make them feel that they had done wrong. So he said to them, "It is not good that you do: ought you not to walk in the fear of God? Restore to them, I pray you, this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, and the money which you have

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taken from them." The nobles attended to all Nehemiah said. They did not try to excuse themselves; for they felt that they had done wrong, and were very sorry, and willing to restore the possessions of their poor brethren. They said to Nehemiah, "So will we do." Then he made them promise; and they all answered, "Amen," and praised the Lord; "and the people did according to this promise." So all ended well; and, we may hope, that the nobles did not again oppress their poor brethren. Nehemiah himself set them a good example; for he fed many of the Jews at his table every day, and was kind and generous to all; and he did this "because of the fear of God."

Unkindness and selfishness are sins which make God very angry. He is kind and merciful, and he commands us to be so too. He shows his love in all that he gives us; but he showed it most when he gave his Son to die for our sins. Then, "If God so loved us we ought also to love one another." And Jesus Christ is full of love. When he was upon earth, he "Went about doing good." There

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was no unkindness, no selfishness in him, and if we are the servants of Christ, we shall try to be like him. He says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Let us pray, then, to have this love put into our hearts. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit which God promises to give to those who ask him.

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CHAPTER LIX.

THE PLOTS OF SANBALLAT.

SANBALLAT and Tobiah could not fight against the Jews; but they tried to trouble and hinder them in their work. Sometimes they sent for Nehemiah to come and see them. This was tempting him to be idle, that the building might be stopped. But Nehemiah said, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you?" They sent to him four times; but Nehemiah gave always the same answer; so at last they left off, and tried to trouble him in another way. We may learn here, a lesson of industry from Nehemiah. We have not walls and cities to build, as he had, but we all have some business to do. And how should we do it? Very quickly, and very diligently; because we have much to do, and very little time to do it in. "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy

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might; for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

But how did Sanballat trouble the Jews now? He sent a letter to Nehemiah, open, that every one might read it. This letter told him that he was accused of wishing to make himself king; and that the Jews were accused of rebellion; and Sanballat asked Nehemiah to come and consult with him what should be done. There was no truth in this letter; and Nehemiah was too wise to be deceived by it; so he sent to Sanballat, saying, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." So Sanballat was disappointed again. But soon after, these cruel enemies tried to trouble and deceive Nehemiah once more. They now hired a false prophet, named Shemaiah, to help them. Shemaiah shut himself up in his house, and called Nehemiah, and said to him, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple; and let us shut the doors of the temple; for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night they will come to slay thee." But Nehe-

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miah knew that he was doing God's work, and that he must not forsake that work; and he remembered too, that God could preserve him from danger. So he answered, "Should such a man as I flee? I will not go in." And Nehemiah found afterwards, that all Shemaiah had said was false. It was only a plot of Tobiah and Sanballat to get him into the temple, to do him some hurt. So Nehemiah was preserved by doing his duty, and trusting to God's protection.

When we have duties to do, we ought not to leave them hastily. It is God who places us where we are, and gives us these duties to do; and he will help and protect us in danger, if we trust all to him. Such men as Nehemiah need never fear. They may say, "The Lord is on our side; we will not fear; what can man do unto us?" Enemies may perhaps trouble, and persecute, and even kill them; but they can do no more; they cannot hurt the soul. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." The wicked *may* fear; for they have no God to protect and bless them. Wherever they go, God's curse is upon them;

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and they can have no comfort in trouble, and sorrow, and death. In times of danger, we see the wicked full of fear. They are afraid even when there is no real danger. "The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth; but the righteous is bold as a lion." Pray that you may be among the righteous, and then nothing need make you afraid.

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CHAPTER LX.

THE LAW EXPLAINED.

THE wall was now finished; the Jews had built it fifty two days. All the plots of their enemies had failed, and those enemies were obliged to confess that the work was God's, and that they could not hinder it. If God determine to do a thing, all the wicked men in the world cannot prevent that thing from being done. God promised the poor captive Jews in Babylon, that they should return to their own land, and build their temple and their city again; and so it was. There are many promises in the Bible to the Jews, yet unfulfilled. After Nehemiah's time, the people of Judah, as well as the ten tribes, were scattered over all the countries of the earth; and their country was given to strangers, because of their sins,—their unbelief, and especially their rejection of Christ. But they will return, and when the right time is come, God will "arise and have mercy upon Zion." Let us pray God to hasten this happy time, when the

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Jews will be restored to their own beloved country and city again. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee."

It was now almost time for Nehemiah to return to Persia; and he appointed his brother Hanani to be ruler over Jerusalem, while he was away. But before he went, he counted the people, and found the number to be forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides a great many servants. So they came, and dwelt in their cities. Then all the people gathered themselves together to pray, and praise the Lord. Ezra the good priest of whom we read before, brought out the book of the law, and stood upon a pulpit of wood, to read aloud to the people. As soon as he opened the book they all stood up; and when he blessed the Lord, the people answered, "Amen, amen;" and lifted up their hands, and bowed their heads, and worshipped God. Then Ezra, and the Levites, read and explained the law, and made the people understand it. They all wept when they heard the law, and were afraid because they remembered how often they had disobeyed the commands of God. But Nehe-

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miah and Ezra comforted them, and told them not to mourn or weep, for it was a holy day unto the Lord, and a day of thankfulness and praise. Nehemiah said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto the Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." They were not only to rejoice themselves, but to try to make others happy too. So the people wiped away their tears, and began to rejoice in God, because now "They understood the words that were declared unto them."

It was now the time for the feast of tabernacles. This feast should have been kept every year; but the people had grown forgetful of their holy things, and had not attended to it for a very long time. But now they wished to be obedient to God, and to do all he had commanded them; so they cut down branches from the pine, and the olive, and the myrtle, and the palm trees, and made themselves booths upon the roofs of their houses, and in the courts of the temple, and in the streets; and sat under the booths, rejoicing, and praising God, seven days.

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Every day, Ezra read to them from the book of the law of God; and on the eighth day, they all assembled to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord. After this, they kept a very solemn fast. They put on sackcloth, and threw dust upon their heads, and gathered themselves together to pray and confess their sins. They spent many hours, partly in prayer, and partly in reading the law. The Levites called upon the people to stand up and bless the Lord, and then offered a prayer aloud for them all. They thanked God who had, so many years before, chosen Abraham, and given him the land of Canaan for a possession. They remembered the wonderful things God had done for Abraham's seed, in delivering them from Egypt, and preserving them in the wilderness, and bringing them to the promised land; and they blessed and praised him for all. Then they confessed the sins of their fathers; their rebellion and disobedience, and forgetfulness of God; and acknowledged that they deserved all they had suffered so many years in Babylon. And lastly, the Levites thanked God for bringing them home to their own land again, and made a convenant to obey the Lord, and to

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serve him faithfully. This covenant was written and sealed by the Levites, and the priests, and the princes. It was a solemn promise to keep themselves apart from the wicked people around them; and to attend in all things to the commands of God; and this promise was written and sealed, to make it more sure, and to impress it upon the minds of the people.

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CHAPTER LXI.

NEHEMIAH'S RETURN.

NEHEMIAH returned to Persia, but after some time, he came again to Jerusalem. And how did he find the people? Were they still living in the fear of God, and trying to please him in all they did? No; Nehemiah was sorry to find that they had done some things which were very wrong, while he was away. The priest who ruled over God's house had become friendly with Tobiah, the wicked enemy of the Jews; and given him a large room in the court of the temple where the holy things ought to have been kept. And Nehemiah found some of the people making wine, and carrying burdens, and buying and selling, on the Sabbath day; and some had mingled themselves with the idolatrous nations around. All these things vexed Nehemiah very much. He commanded that Tobiah should be sent away from the room in God's house; and that the holy vessels, and the offerings, and the incense, should be brought in. The evening before the Sabbath,

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he commanded the gates of the city to be shut; and he placed his servants there to prevent them from being opened, and any burdens from being brought in. Then he spoke very solemnly to the nobles, and the priests, and the Levites, and told them, that if they disobeyed the commands of God, they would make him angry, and bring evil upon their country, as their fathers had done so many years before. So the people attended to what their wise and faithful governor said, and separated themselves from the idolatrous nations around, and sold and bought no more on the Sabbath. Nehehemiah loved his country; and he showed his love for it in the best way,—by teaching the people to live in the fear of God; for only those countries can be truly happy in which God is known, and feared and loved.

The Bible tells us no more about this holy man Nehemiah. He himself wrote the account of these things of which we have just read, and he ended that account with this beautiful prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good." Nehemiah had been working many years in God's service, and he humbly prayed that God would not forget him, nor the work that he had done.

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But Nehemiah did not think that he deserved any reward for his services. He well knew that the best and holiest people deserve nothing; they have done only their duty after all, and they have done it very imperfectly too; for all their works have been mingled with sin. And therefore Jesus says, "When ye have done all, say we are unprofitable servants." Yet God is so gracious, that he promises he will accept the services of his people, if done for his sake, and from love to him. He will not forget their "Work of faith, and labour of love," and will say to them in the day of Judgment, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Let us labour in the service and for the people of God, as Nehemiah did, and pray like him, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

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CHAPTER LXII.

THE PROPHET MALACHI.

THERE was only one prophet more after Nehemiah's time. His name was Malachi. He spoke to the people of the Lord Jesus Christ who was now soon coming; and of John the Baptist who should first appear to prepare the way before him. Malachi warned the people of their sins, for there were many among them who had sinned very greatly against the Lord; and invited them to return to God, and told them what blessings they would have if they truly served him. Some of them did truly serve him, and Malachi had a message of comfort and encouragement for them. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I

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will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

God attends to his people now as much as he did then. He still sees what we do, and hears what we say, and writes all down in the Book of his Remembrance. And a day is coming when that book will be opened and read. Then he will declare who has served him, and who has served him not, and will separate the righteous from the wicked for ever. Are you ready for that great and dreadful day? Are you among those who truly love and serve God? If not, pray now, while there is time, that you may be made ready for death and judgment. Ask to have your sins washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ, and your heart made new by the Holy Spirit; that, when that dreadful day comes, you may be spared, and treasured up with the Lord's "jewels," his precious ones, in Heaven.

We have come now to the end of the Old Testament history. In the next part of the Bible, the New Testament, we shall read more about the Lord Jesus Christ, of his birth, and

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life, and death; of all which he did and suffered to save sinners. But it is not in the New Testament only that we read of Christ. We have read much about him already. He himself said to his disciples, "Search the Scriptures, (the Old Testament Scriptures) for they testify of me." And after his resurrection, "He expounded unto them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself." We read about Christ in the garden of Eden, when he promised Adam and Eve that he would come and die for them. We read about his appearing to Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and Joshua, and Gideon, and Manoah. We read about him, too, in the types and sacrifices, for they all told us of him. Yes, the whole Bible is about Jesus Christ; and it is this which makes it so very necessary, and so very precious to us; because, if we knew nothing of Christ, we could know nothing of salvation, and nothing of the way to Heaven; for he is the only way.

Learn, then, to love the Bible more and more. Read it every day, and pray for the Holy Spirit to enable you to understand it.

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You may be young and ignorant; and many troubles, and difficulties, and temptations, may be before you, which you have no power in yourself to resist and overcome. But the Bible tells you how you may find comfort, and help, and wisdom, and happiness, and all you need. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto, according to thy word."

END OF PART III.

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